

A new colonization of Africa

Obianuju Ekeocha for the Week for Life in Brussels, March 19, 2019.

Obianuju Ekeocha is a young African biomedical scientist living in the United Kingdom. It is her passion to ensure that African values are preserved and valued and that is why she founded the organization "Culture of Life Africa". With this she wants to correct the misconceptions that exist about Africa in the western world.

In the Week for Life in Brussels she gave the following speech.

“Colonialism is a thing of the past, but in recent years we have seen that rich western countries and donors are actually recolonizing: they act from the misguided belief that they know what is best for African women and families: more abortion and contraception , fewer children, less motherhood. In most cases, the African people have not asked for this at all.

There are undeniable shortcomings in various systems in Africa, such as a shortage of jobs and education. In total, there are approximately 96 million young people in the sub-Saharan African region who should be in school but who are not there. That is a guarantee of lifelong poverty. There is a shortage of clean drinking water. And I would like to point out that the former and now deceased Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, stated in one of the speeches on World Environment Day that "Water-related diseases are responsible for 80% of all diseases and deaths in developing countries". If this is true it should be considered an emergency and it should dominate all discussions and considerations about aid.

There is no widely accessible and affordable health care. For example, there are millions of people with diabetes in Africa. I know that there are also millions of people in Europe and other parts of the developed world living with diabetes, but the reason that I point out these millions of cases in Africa is that most of our healthcare systems are not accessible or even affordable to the lower- and middle-class populations. This means that any disease condition that is long-term or has to be treated for life is not affordable and therefore means unimaginable suffering for those affected.

But do you know what has become the 'African need' that has dominated discussions in international forums? It is that of sexual and reproductive health and rights and is funded by the population programs.

This was not the case in the past and I have looked for the cause of the emergence of this new predominant ideology. This led to a meeting in September 1994 of a United Nations International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo, Egypt, which brought together thousands of delegates from various governments, UN agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). During this meeting, sexual and reproductive health were renamed as human rights. The resulting document laid the foundation for international donors to become the major suppliers of contraceptives and devices in poor countries, as it specifically urged the international community to:

"Immediately establish an efficient coordination system and global, regional and sub-regional facilities for procurement of contraceptives and other resources essential to reproductive health programs of developing and transition economies."

From that point onward, many donor nations raised family planning in developing countries to the level of a humanitarian crisis and exponentially increased its spending and funding streams in this area.

much lower than funds allocated for education, water & sanitation, healthcare, government & civil society and so on. Foreign aid projects now reflect the ideas and ideologies of the donors more than the needs of the recipients.

Take for example *Abortion*.

Abortion has existed for centuries, so we know what abortion is. In my own native language - the Igbo language, we have a way of saying what abortion is, but try as one might, abortion ALWAYS has a negative connotation no matter how it is said. This is because my people have always considered abortion to be a direct attack on human life at its most tender and vulnerable stage.

We also see it as an attack on precious bloodlines that connect generations from past to present to future. It was only when I moved to the western world that I realized that there are ways of sanitizing the term abortion by euphemising it - the right to choose, reproductive rights, reproductive justice, termination of pregnancy (or just TOP), removal of product of conception.

Abortion rights

I attended a number of CSW events at the UN last week and it was horrifying for me to sit in on some of the presentations on Abortion Rights.

These were all events hosted by western nations having as its core an ambitious agenda to push for abortion rights to become universal.

I was handed this document right here entitled the ***Brussels Declaration*** which I can only describe as an abortion rights manifesto that is targeted at universalizing legal abortion (see below).

I'm not sure if what shocked me the most was the condescension for the cultural views and values of hundreds of millions of people in the developing world, or the disdain for the millions of people who believe in the sanctity of human life at every stage and phase of development or the complete disregard for sovereign nations that have only in the last half a century gained independence from colonization.

At the core of my people's value system is the profound recognition that human life is precious, paramount, and supreme. For us, abortion, which is the deliberate killing of little ones in the womb, is a direct attack on innocent human life. It is a serious injustice, which no one should have the right to commit.

Perhaps Africans tend to oppose abortion because safely bringing healthy babies into the world is more difficult in Africa than in developed countries.

Perhaps Africans are more grateful for every pregnancy and every successful delivery, and for that matter for every dawn they rise to see, because they have a deeper awareness of the preciousness and the precariousness of life.

Unfortunately, in most cases, the donors are reluctant to consider African cultural views and values when they deal with us. They see the developing world as a cultural vacuum to be filled with their ideas or fallow land to be cultivated with their ideologies. And what is more disconcerting is that they approach us from a place of perceived superiority and thus with high expectations of compliance by African governments.

This is the uncomfortable dynamic of modern-day ideological colonialism which has developed between western donors and their developing world recipients.

I am in favor of foreign aid be done differently with the voices of the recipients at the centre of considerations with the aid projects reflecting more the people's real needs than the donors' ideological positions.

I as an African woman am hoping for a profound and meaningful change in all matters regarding aid.

I am hoping to see the day of economic decolonization and the dawn of ideological decolonization, that will be the day of our real independence. "

Afterwards I spoke to Uju for a moment. I was a bit concerned with regard to the population increase in Africa. The answer of Uju is actually quite simple: make sure that girls also can go to school. Because if they don't go to school, they have to get married and have children. This process is postponed by schooling and fewer children are born automatically.

Leontine Bakermans