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Kenya's afflictions go far beyond scandals of corruption

By Jeffrey D Sachs

From Prof Jeffrey D. Sachs.

Sir, I was sorry to see Michael Holman's justified distaste for Kenyan corruption transformed into an illogical rant against the aid donors

to that country ("The donors who turn a blind eye to Kenyan sleaze", February 16).

Mr Holman disdainfully quotes a UK aid official who says: "It is possible to deliver benefits directly to poor Kenyans without releasing resources to be misused elsewhere." He goes on to ask: "So how does he explain the pauperisation of Kenya?" The answer is that corruption is not the be all and end all of Kenya's poverty. Kenya has suffered a massive Aids pandemic, a resurgence of malaria due to drug resistance of the parasite, repeated severe droughts perhaps due in part to long-term climate change, terrorist attacks followed by US warnings against tourist travel to Kenya, the instability of Kenya's commodity prices in world markets, protectionism in European and US markets against many Kenyan goods, massive soil nutrient depletion, wars in neighbouring countries, inflows of refugees from Sudan, Uganda, Ethiopia and Somalia, rapid population growth and urbanisation, and many other factors.

Kenya, in short, is suffering a multiplicity of massive ecological, geopolitical, demographic and disease disturbances that afflict much of the region and far transcend particular scandals addressed by Mr Holman.

In the face of all of this upheaval throughout the region, donor assistance has been limited and erratic. This is hardly the occasion to bemoan offers of fresh help. Mr Holman accuses Paul Wolfowitz, the World Bank president, and Hilary Benn, the UK secretary of state for international development, of "arrogantly" continuing aid flows - an utterly strange and distasteful charge in the context of Kenya's killer drought, which is currently putting millions of its children and their parents at imminent peril of disease and death. By delivering measurable aid in forms such as, for example, medicines, anti-malaria bednets, safe water points, improved seed and fertiliser, livestock and salaries for nurses and other health workers, aid will indeed reach those who need help, thereby saving lives and helping to put Kenya on a path of increasing incomes and improved governance. Mr Holman even characterises as "ironic" a World Bank loan to fight corruption, as if that were somehow

illogical under the circumstances.

Mr Holman does a disservice to the poor and suffering Kenya people that he clearly cares so much about, by wrongly attributing all of their suffering to corruption and by failing to note the very important ways that they can be assisted through practical, targeted, measurable, and urgently needed help.

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