

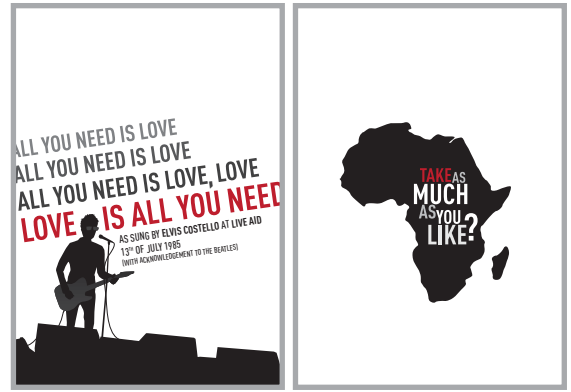
ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE
ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE
ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE, LOVE
LOVE IS ALL YOU NEED



AS SUNG BY ELVIS COSTELLO AT LIVE AID
13TH OF JULY 1985
(WITH ACKNOWLEDGEMENT TO THE BEATLES)

SINGING FOR THEIR SUPPER: DEBATING LIVE AID

Live Aid, the original of the species (followed by Farm Aid, Sport Aid, Live 8, etc.) was a major popular music event organised on July 13th, 1985 by Bob Geldof and Midge Ure in response to the famine that took place in Ethiopia in 1984/1985. The event(s), described by the organisers as the 'global jukebox', were held simultaneously in Wembley Stadium, in London (attended by 82,000 people) and JFK Stadium, Philadelphia (attended by about 99,000 people) with concerts also taking place in Australia and Germany. In 1985, it became one of the largest-scale satellite link-ups and television broadcasts of all time with an estimated audience of 400 million viewers in 60 countries worldwide.



Live Aid directly raised some £50 million for humanitarian intervention as well as for development programmes in Ethiopia; it raised the issue of the famine and similar events to a new 'high' in terms of awareness and publicity; it kick-started a whole new generation of 'activists' concerned with Africa, its problems and the responsibility of the West; it inspired a wave of 'celebrity'-led fundraising and advocacy on development, justice and human rights and it generated very considerable controversy. This controversy continues to this day with similar debates and arguments about celebrities, musicians, fashion designers, artists and actors 'leading' campaigns for 'good causes' as well as about Live 8, another Geldof and Ure inspired event focused on the G8 summit in Gleneagles, Scotland in July 2005 and the 'Long Walk to Justice' campaign that preceded it.

While Live Aid and similar 'popular' events, especially those involving artists of different types, have been hugely praised, they have also been criticised, often severely, for a number of reasons.

On the positive side, Live Aid has been praised for:

- Forcing the world to face up to the Ethiopian famine and is credited by some commentators with cutting the death toll in Ethiopia by as much as 25% to 50%
- Raising the debate on poverty and hunger to a new level, using new media, than had been achieved to date in the 20th century (a profound 'social innovation' – Geldof)
- Creating a heightened awareness of such issues amongst a new generation (of young people?) who then went on to take up the 'cause' more broadly ('Ethiopia would not have got the attention it did without Live Aid' – Macrae of the Overseas Development Institute)
- Forcing governments and politicians to take action, even if only on the aid front
- Generating massive 'ownership' of the agenda outside of the control and direction of governments and non-governmental organisations (many of whom resented Live Aid)
- Making poverty and development, and later, human rights a 'fashionable' cause and one that high profile individuals, artists (and politicians) wished to be associated with, it provided a new prototype for popular engagement.

Against this, Live Aid has been criticised for:

- Contributing to the possible deaths of many thousands of Ethiopians who were forced by the then government of Mengistu Haile Mariam to move to resettlement camps against their will (with an estimated 50,000 dying on route) and for working alongside a dictatorship
- Presenting Africa as a 'basket case' and Africans as either villains (dictators and corrupt leaders, armies, bureaucrats, etc.) or as victims, and not acknowledging the work of African governments, organisations

and communities

- Trivialising complex development and human rights issues and reducing them to a voluntary/official aid agenda – (‘every seasoned aid worker knew then, and knows now, that there is no necessary connection between raising money for a good cause and that money being well spent, just as there is no necessary connection between caring about the suffering of others and understanding the nature or cause of that suffering’ – journalist David Rieff)
- Being primarily about the egos and careers of aging western rock stars and for ignoring African artists and performers, many of whom had spoken out (and continue to do so) on these issues regularly

In her book *Whose Hunger*, Jenny Edkins summarises the criticisms of Live Aid:

‘The images were negative; they showed the people caught up in the famine only as victims. No African aid workers were shown, only white Europeans, giving the impression that the West was coming to the rescue of the incompetent Africans. People were not allowed to speak for themselves – the voice over of a commentator replaced interviews. The use of such negative images, portraying Africans as passive, victims, was little short of racism.’

Some critics of this ‘Live Aid Generation’ have even gone so far as to describe the celebrity led, popular anti-poverty movement in the West as the new Berlin Conference which originally divided up Africa between the colonial powers, as the ‘new scramble for Africa’.

African academic Moses Ochonu responds to this criticism:

‘The analogy is a little far-fetched... the spectacle of a self-righteous and arrogant Europe (this time joined by Japan, Canada, and US), pontificating on the failings and supposedly intractable problems of Africa is quite disturbing and reminiscent of similar proclamations in the past. It does conjure up images from a not-so-distant history of Africa’s interaction with Europe. And, of course, no self-respecting African would find palatable the television and radio sound bites about do-good white men (and boys) once again raising money to help Africa’s needy and hungry. One would wish not to encounter such images.’

However, while I remain very critical of, among other things, the G-8’s unacceptable failure to make a deal on fair trade and Africa-friendly trade practices, I personally would not extend my criticism of the G-8 summit of political leaders to the “Live Aid” initiative.

In spite of this mental, moral, and material distance from the African predicament, these privileged men and women in the Western anti-poverty movement have the humanity, sense of compassion, and conscience to craft a humanitarian initiative that could bring immediate relief to the hungry, the diseased, and the needy in many parts of Africa ...

I don’t think we Africans gain anything for ourselves or for our struggle for basic human comforts and dignities by mocking or trivializing the efforts of the anti-poverty movement in the West. It is, at best, a distraction from the challenge of awakening major stakeholders in the African situation to their obligations and responsibilities. We can point out the near-revolutionary naivety and Utopian idealism which inevitably colour Western anti-poverty movements. But in the end, the Bonos and the Geldofs deserve praise and commendation for their extraordinary humanity, and for using a private anti-poverty initiative to put pressure on Western officialdom, which, so far, is behind Oxfam, Bono, Geldof, and others in appreciating the dire need for action and change on the continent and for a departure from faulty premises of problem-solving’

While Live Aid was the first such initiative, many more have followed – Sport Aid, Farm Aid, Fashion Aid, Live 8, the Long Walk for Justice. Yet the arguments and debates remain the same – *what is, should be, the relationship between popular movements and events and world affairs? Where does Africa and Africans fit into such movements and events? How do we make complex issues and challenges accessible? Was Elvis Costello (erm...and the Beatles!) right – is love all you need?*