

## **TO GIVE OR NOT TO GIVE: why should the NZ Govt give to foreign aid?**

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So why bother with ODA anyway – why is it our responsibility to help poor people overseas? It's a difficult question to answer, because on one level it's so obvious. Development saves lives. It brings long-term solutions to poverty for whole communities. It reduces conflict, improves human rights, and brings justice. It lowers birth rates, preventing overpopulation naturally. It empowers people who would otherwise have little hope of escaping cycles of poverty. How can we refuse to give less than one per cent of our income to those who need it infinitely more than us?

We owe it to our international brothers and sisters to help them have the basics of life that we take for granted; clean water, education, health care and food security. There's a saying that "charity begins at home", but it certainly doesn't end at home. There are plenty of people in the world who are still struggling to survive, especially with the current food crisis. Meanwhile we live in the lap of luxury – even "poor students" will spend \$20 on a few beers, while half the world lives on less than that for an entire week. And we only became so rich at the expense of the Majority World – we rely on a global economic system that is stacked in favour of rich countries like ours. We are partly to blame for poverty, and we ought to do what we can to right those wrongs.

Perhaps the question is why shouldn't we give ODA? Some say we can't afford it. But the current government has been in power for eight years of strong economic growth and multi-billion-dollar surpluses. They've found plenty of money for tax cuts this election year, but can't seem to find anything for 0.7 per cent. Others claim that ODA doesn't do any good, and point to the worst possible reports of ODA being misspent. But these situations are the minority, and even if the Government is doing a bad job of managing it, that doesn't mean they should stop giving ODA – it means they need to work harder to make sure it's being well spent.

These counter-arguments are obviously dishonest, because the government keeps promising 0.7 per cent at the United Nations and international summits. If the government really believed their own excuses, they wouldn't keep committing to 0.7 per cent. They're happy to sing the praises of ODA when they want to save face and impress the international community. But back home, they're unwilling to put their money where their mouths are, and they resort to pathetic excuses and diversionary tactics to avoid keeping their promises.

The question isn't really "to give or not to give"; everyone knows it's a good idea to help people. Nobody really believes that we need iPhones and beer more than kids in Cambodia need education and water. The problem is that if you admit you ought to be giving to the poor, you have to do something about it. It's easier to make excuses than sacrifices, but our elected representatives should not keep choosing excuses over action. We should definitely be giving ODA, and it's time the Government takes seriously their promises and makes 0.7 per cent happen.

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