

## [Of cheetahs and good coffee](#) [1]

Written by [Sam Bowman](#) [2] | Tuesday 10 April 2012



It's often striking how dim a view of humanity people on the left tend to take. Nowhere is this clearer than when it comes to international development. Poor countries are suffering from a "poverty gap", many claim, which they cannot cross without the West's help. Funnily, the West did not need this kind of help when *it* grew rich, nor did a decent number of now-rich countries in East Asia. But Africa, we're told, cannot do this.

I was reminded of this wrong idea while reading [the story of Andrew Rugasira](#) [3], a Ugandan entrepreneur whose company, [Good African Coffee](#) [4], has flourished and now supplies supermarkets like Tesco, Sainsbury's and Waitrose. Rugasira set up the first coffee roasting factory in Africa, and business is booming. Though his company has taken some money from USAID (probably inevitable, given the crowding-out effects that this sort of government money has on marginal investment), Rugasira is adamant that trade is Africa's only hope:

?Every society that has prospered has done it through trade and not aid,? Rugasira told Fine when they met in London. Rugasira touched on Asia in recent decades. ?Africa will be no different. Charity doesn?t incentivize. It stifles innovation. It causes chronic dependency. Africa?s contribution to global trade is 1 percent. If that were just 2 percent, the increase would bring far more annual revenue to the continent than all the aid Africa receives in a year.?

Indeed. The Ghanaian economist George Ayittey talks about the ["cheetahs" of Africa](#) [5]: the new generation of entrepreneurs who are agile, connected to the global economy, and hungry for profit. These are the people using [mobile phones to revolutionize finance](#) [6] and other parts of African economies, and side-step the dead-hand states that have held back African development for decades.

The idea of "races in their nonage" needing Western help was used to justify 19th Century colonialism; it has survived, in a slightly different form, in the world of development aid advocacy. This idea was and is utterly wrong. The promise of this generation of "cheetahs" is that the increasingly globalized marketplace may mean that bad governments are no longer a complete road-block to growth: if they "only" severely inhibit it, there is a lot of potential in many parts of Africa.

We should be electrified by these entrepreneurs. They're proving, again, that people don't need government to lift them out of poverty, they just need to be allowed to do the lifting themselves. That's the view of humanity I'm happy to take: that people, above all, are the most valuable and productive things on earth.

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