



Transcript of Development Drums

Episode 38 - Bob Geldof – highlights

Episode 39 - Bob Geldof – full interview

Host: Owen Barder. Guest: Bob Geldof

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Owen Barder

Thanks for downloading Development Drums. My name is Owen Barder at the Center for Global Development in Europe. My guest today is Bob Geldof, the singer, song writer, author and anti-poverty campaigner. In this podcast, Bob talks about his current work promoting investment in jobs in Africa through a private equity company and we look back at Band Aid, Live Aid, and the Gleneagles Summit. Bob addresses with characteristic robustness those critics who say that Band Aid focused too much on Africa's problems and those who say that charity is not enough.

This podcast is the full-length interview with Bob Geldof. But I do realize that not everyone wants to listen to an hour and a quarter of me and Bob Geldof reminiscing about Ethiopia or about Make Poverty History. So you do have the option of switching right now to a shorter half hour podcast containing the highlights from this interview. It's available as a separate Development Drums podcast.

Bob Geldof became famous as the lead singer of the Irish rock band, The Boomtown Rats in the late 1970s and 1980s. And he starred in Pink Floyd's 1982 film, The Wall. But as an anti-poverty campaigner that he'll be best known to listeners of this podcast. In 1984 he and Midge Ure brought together a group of musicians under the name Band Aid, which recorded a hit single "Do They Know It's Christmas?" to raise money for famine relief in Ethiopia. They went on to organize the Live Aid concerts in 1985. Since then, Bob Geldof has remained closely involved in campaigning against poverty. I met him in London to talk about his work.

Bob Geldof, thanks for coming on Development Drums.

Bob Geldof

Thanks, Owen.

Owen Barder

So you're a regular visitor to Africa and I've heard you talk recently with a certain passion about Africa today as being very different from Africa of 25 years ago. Tell us what you're seeing and how you see Africa now?

Bob Geldof

Well I don't see any difference in the dynamism of the people. It's just that it's being able to be realized and that's the excitement really. If you're engaged in sort of humanitarian stuff, the excitement if that's the correct word is enable people to stay alive and advance perhaps the lives of their children through better health or education or stuff. Today it's almost like in the time that I've been doing that those children are of age and now there is something else. So I remember speaking to an Ethiopian father up in the highlands and saying why don't you send the boy to school. And he said what for, and I said so he can learn. He said what for and I said so he can be educated and develop himself as a human and get a job. And he said, what job? Where?

And that's less tricky a question to answer today. And that becomes very exciting then for the possibility of that same child.

Owen Barder

So you're seeing jobs and economic growth across Africa, is this just...

Bob Geldof

Not across it but it has a critical mass now. You would see it in spots and inevitably it would be the resource spots, the commodity spots, the extractive spots. But you're seeing now sort of critical mass occurring regionally and of course when we talk regionally in Africa and I know people listening to this are development buffs but just bear in mind because you forget when you talk region, you're talking about vast spaces of the earth, you know I mean just the horn is basically the size of India. And so when you say regionally I mean it's big stuff.

Owen Barder

And how much of it is driven by extractives and how much of it is other kinds of business?

Bob Geldof

The figures are 5% – sorry, 25% continentally but if you take a very coherent right now, political and societal culture like Ghana, you are seeing full democracy where elections are touch and go and yes, there is peaceful transitions, completely free press but you're also seeing massive growth of 13% per annum. 5% of that at the moment is extractives and very cleverly they've asked the Norwegians to help them, you know, handle this new boom in extractives that they found.

So that's repeating in a couple of places but in general I mean I think the key figure is continentally growth of 6% to 7% but only 25% of that is extractives. So you're seeing massive proper growth across the general width of the economy.

Owen Barder

And you're involved in this organization 8 Miles.

Bob Geldof

It's not an organization, it's a company.

Owen Barder

It's a company? Okay. And what does it do?

Bob Geldof

It's a private equity company investing in Africa. So here are the PE riffs that you don't know. It's pan-sectoral and opportunistic, which means that it's all of Africa can be taken into account if there is an opportunity. And it's pan-sectoral, which means it's not just telecommunications or agro business or something. What it isn't is extractives, we won't do extractives mainly because it's messy. And anyway there is far bigger fish in there than us.

But there is no need to get engaged in that anyway because it's the other sectors that require development and it's in the other sectors where you get jobs and that's what interests me next in sort of, if you want Bob's big adventure in Africa, the next part is jobs. If you'd said that to me in 1985, I would have looked at you like you're mad.

Owen Barder

And to what extent do you think this is going to replace over time, the need for us to be giving aid, and other kinds of concessional money to Africa?

Bob Geldof

Over time it will completely replace it but right now the two are absolutely critical and you couldn't have got to this point without aid and you won't get further without aid. Aid is the best spend.

Owen Barder

Explain how that connection works with...

Bob Geldof

Okay, well but how – if you want to look across the field charity, which development people don't like talking about but in fact they are dependent on it almost entirely. They like to use words like philanthropy, like philanthropist. No, but charity is singular and special because charity is a human being in Barnsley, Hull, some small town in Germany or Sweden or the United States or wherever, seeing another human being hurt and responding with clear empathy, across distance simply in response to another human being hurt and deciding that it won't be done in their name.

And the most they can do for most people is put their hand in their pocket and at these crippling times that is a serious "most". And they put a pound or a buck or a euro or whatever, a yen, into the charity box. Now two things happen at that point, one is you get the vital, for me, human instinct to help another person. That's critical. But if a million people put that pound in that box then you get a big political lobby. An individual putting the quid in the box, people say that's nice, a million people the politicians start going a bit wary about that.

And if that million pounds is focused not the money but just obviously that has to go to the people but the political lobby that is potentially there, if that's focused in a political way, you have a huge amount of influence. So what the charity, what the money will do is stabilize the individual or the family at a very basic level. So you putting your quid in will just keep that people person going.

What aid is supposed to do, people got confused about this. It's such a small amount in the overall scheme of things that all really it can enable societies to do is again to cohere at a sort of community level of basic health, basic agriculture, basic education. It also helps and this is now increasingly important for my point of view. It helps to cohere governance because if governance

can't function and in the development world as you know that's called the capacity, the capacity to act, the capacity to govern.

If they can't do that, then nothing will happen in a country, absolutely nothing. If you can't pay the police, if you can't pay the army, then you will not have law. So there is no state. So what happens is that then people owe an allegiance to a super national identity or a super-intra national identity that gives them benefits. So we have a very basic level of society just about scraping along between there and governance you have this void in that void is the economy.

Generally in African countries, you have massive companies at the very top, if they are there, like your Shell, like your Diageo, et cetera. They do give massive amounts for employment but in terms of a country, negligible. Down at the very bottom you've got mom-and-pop stores. They are not even SMEs, small to medium enterprises, which are the lifeblood and dynamic of our economies. We will invest our lives into an idea project. People will put their houses, their families at stake; they'll borrow from banks just to get an idea. Out of the 100 SMEs that start one will be our Diageo of tomorrow.

That doesn't pertain for me in Africa. I know there will be development economists listening to this and going that's ridiculous, I don't think so. As you know huge amounts of the continental economy or the informal economy by that we mean not even your mom-and-pop stores, the women selling oil from the olive jars in Nigeria on the corner, street corner stuff. You can't expand out of that. It's survival. It's the urban equivalent of the rural farmer scratching at the soil and never being able to look up and use the creativity in his mind.

There is no economy to grow into, SMEs have a chance in us because if you start a business tomorrow, there is a chance that I'll buy your stuff. That's not true in Africa. There is no economy to expand into, so SMEs don't really have traction. For me, where it needs to grow is in that middle section of the economy that creates jobs and taxable income. Once the state can tax proper income, it can begin to cohere, it can pay its police, its courts, its army. It can begin to stabilize and that to me is really the gain jobs that will have taxable income where the state can cohere.

If you don't have that, then quite rightly families will trust themselves. They'll then trust the tribe, the clan and perhaps super national identities like Islam or the Catholic Church or something else.

Owen Barder

And 8 Miles is investing in businesses in that gap?

Bob Geldof

In that gap, typically a £15 to £25 million investment and there are a number of those companies beginning to get traction now. And for me as I say the thing is where can you invest in a local national company that you know will create even further jobs. But also with proper labor laws not just national but international labor standards as we've seen from the Chinese to go in there arrogantly and behave as you do it home is a no-brainer. Well we know that from our own past in Africa. The Chinese are learning fast but they don't generally behave all that well.

Owen Barder

And what examples are there – have you got any investments up and running yet or is this still none, you're still identifying the opportunities?

Bob Geldof

In fact I've just come from a management meeting of 8 Miles and we're looking at investing now. So all these things take forever, bloody hell but I mean its other people's money, so I mean how PE works is that a group of experts. I put it together with a friend of mine in this office in fact. And we are not PE experts but I just thought it's the last thing I can do. What I am able to do is if you take Live Aid, Live Aid could have been The Boomtown Rats for 17 hours but that would have been even a little much for me and nobody would have watched.

So you need to get together best in class and everyone watches. And for the commission for Africa, there is no use me summoning the world leaders to London. They won't come but if you can get Tony Blair to invite them and lay out a yearlong program to empirically analyze why Africa remained outside the global economic common wheel, then they'll do it. So the last part is I keep noticing that African business is beginning to have traction. How do you get people, I mean I'm sick of talking about, I'm sick of going to conferences saying look, go down there. That's your job. Like if you're investment managers and you are responsible for other people's money, your job is to find opportunity, go there.

I got sick of it. And I just said all right, well let's try it ourselves and you get people who are literally experts. They are PE people or industry people – people who've run businesses in Africa, big business and you gather them together and say, will you do this with us? And with that credibility, you then go to big asset management people, people who've got a lot of money and say look, you know, you're all over China. China is all over Africa. What's the logic, you go to the Americans and say how can you ignore this when China and India are everywhere.

You go to the Europeans and you say listen, where do you think you're going to export out of this mess? To China, where you are begging on your knees to be part of the most autocratic society? It's eight miles south of here, eight miles. Europe is always been involved in Africa for thousands of years. It's eight miles, you're going to go there. So let us take you there. I mean not Geldof but the people we have in the company. So that's how it works. They put money into you that they've got spare and you use expertise to invest it wisely for them but at the same time hopefully creating businesses and jobs but using environmental sustainable standards, labor standards that are appropriate to ourselves.

Owen Barder

So we're going to come back to Africa today to development policy, but I want to go back, you were talking about Band Aid and Live Aid and just I mean you became famous for your engagement in Ethiopia when you put together as you say this well originally the record. Looking back, was that the right thing to do? Is there something you would have done differently if you had known then what you know now?

Bob Geldof

No. I would have done it exactly the same because it's very hard I'm sure for people. I am old now but '84 was 30 years ago nearly 28 years ago. It's a lifetime away. So the only awareness of Africa was Save The Children, Oxfam, the usual coup d'état et cetera. And that was if it was ever addressed by the media, it was in that context. And so in that context you know when I saw the report Michael Burk's BBC report, it was a response to that probably as I've said a million times to do with the season of the year. The fact of my own personal situation at home, the fact of my career situation which meant I was at home, I mean if you were a happening band, you just simply aren't at home. The market is the world sort of things so you're out there doing whatever recording, playing, interviews whatever.

I was at home and so possibly all of that but mainly the fact is it was sickening, I mean that's the truth. If I came on now I doubt if there would be even the slightest change in people's reaction to it. So if people would respond the same today, as they did in '84, why would I respond any differently. And so all I could do was what I knew what to do, write tunes. And being unsure about my ability now at this point in my career, I got my friend who had just had a big hit, Vienna with Ultravox.

And using the 10 years in rock and roll where you know we were top dogs for amongst with the others, I called up friends. Again it's that thing I said that the Rats doing a Christmas record, it may have dribbled in.

Owen Barder

I'd have bought it.

Bob Geldof

You were our only fan, Owen, but you know, our time had gone. There were new kids on the block with something different to say in the Thatcher era. It responded to you know the punks dressing down to represent their period and tearing up stuff. And you know patching the flag together with pins and safety pins and band-aids and stuff. It was an exact replica of the – I don't think they quite – don't think any of us quite understood but exact replica of the country at the time, falling apart basically stuck together.

And the new crowd the Durans, the Spandaus and the Ultravoxs were blinged out, you know I mean the music was occasionally critical and that but it was let's dance. And so they were the people I knew. They were having hits. I was doing this John Lennon-esque, [Bob] Dylan-esque message song. I don't like them but specifically I set out with a give peace a chance or Happy Christmas war is over, idea in my head. So feed the world.

But if you'd have asked me if 30 years later, one, I'd be still doing it and feed the world, Bob, it's Africa that's going to do that, which it is. Africa having 60% of the last remaining arable land of the planet. It will be Africa that feeds the world which is extraordinary change in fortunes.

Owen Barder

What do you say to people who accuse not just you but that period of perpetuating an image of Africa, the begging bowl image, the needy you know the kid with flies in his eyes. There are people who say well these celebrities, these campaigns, I mean they would probably bracket you with Save The Children and Oxfam and so on. There's people who were concerned to raise money for a good motive but in so doing created an image of Africa that makes it harder, for example for people to do what you are doing now which is raising investment seeing Africa as a business opportunity.

Bob Geldof

Well they are chronically naïve, I mean you know I can understand Africans getting miffed about it because they are proud of their country or continent and they're bedeviled by the fact that when they speak to people, people always say God, you come from there, you poor thing, is it not awful. And so you could understand it but the truth is that was the reality.

Owen Barder

Right.

Bob Geldof

And it's still the reality, disgracefully. I still get – well if you remember from that period it was anger and shame. That was good because that seemed to be what people felt who saw that program. That program was the time of the mono media if you like. Everyone watched the six o'clock news on ITV or BBC. That was your choice and most people watched the news on BBC. I forgot that the whole country saw it.

So blame the bloody BBC or Michael Buerk for discovering, just stumbling into these 350,000 people in Korem, God bless him for understanding what this was. I remember perfectly the sound of his voice, his rage, forget this journalistic objectivity, forget Mo Amin not zeroing in on this horror. Well done them.

Owen Barder

At this point, you had never been to Africa?

Bob Geldof

No, I'd never but I'd done stuff. I started anti-Apartheid when I was 13 in Dublin, in south Dublin with my mate Mick Foley mainly because I am a 20th century, sorry a 1960s kid. I was a child in the 1960s but I am not a child after the '60s and there is a difference. But what informed me entirely in Ireland was rock and roll, as everyone did. This was, I wasn't doing well at school, I was bringing myself up because my mom was dead. My dad sold towels around the countryside, so he was only there on Friday and Saturday.

My sisters, one got married and the other was the family swot, she stayed in school till late. So I was bringing myself up and it was crap. Suddenly into this comes 1963 and here are these boys and girls talking of other possibilities, other universes of possibility. They were talking about the necessity of change and it's inevitability. They were giving you the rhetoric for that change and they were saying that this is the platform. This in itself, this rock and roll thing is the platform for change so Jagger, Lennon, Dylan et cetera Townshend. That was what was going on. That's what I got.

I was always a lyric guy. Because of them I started listening to blues, because they told me to and it gelled with the books I was reading. I was reading Steinbeck and I had pleurisy at 11 so I read Dickens because I was in bed for ages, there was nothing else to bloody read and we didn't have tele. So start back and...

Owen Barder

You said in your autobiography that this period as you were raising yourself if you like was where you learned to speak, to tell overeducated powerful people to bugger off. This gave you self-confidence.

Bob Geldof

No, it didn't. If that's what you got from it, it didn't. You are in school and there is no answering back to authority. You just got beaten, every day in fact but what did happen was you learn not to trust authority and that was not to do with the school. This is my cockamamie theory so forgive me. The polar center of the child's world as we know is the parent. If that polar center abandons ship, in the mother's case by dying and in the father's case because of the necessity of his job, but a kid doesn't care about that. They are just not there.

So how does he learn about authority. And when he bumps into authority in the form of priests or whatever, why should he trust them anymore than the other, they are all going to bail. Or if you

bump into it in the form of the team captain at school. That's when you just turn around because he's a contemporary and you tell him to fuck off, like go there, no, why, explain to me why and then possibly. All that happens and it's not good news.

Reading I can't remember why I think because of Dylan, reading about Dylan I read that he read James Baldwin, so I started reading Baldwin. I started learning about the feeling because he was a great writer about Africa, South Africa. Then the rugby team were coming and I was into CND and I wasn't so much convinced by the CND argument, like if they had a gun up or if they had a nuclear bomb up my arse, I wanted one up theirs. I was pretty clear about that but I liked the symbol.

But anti-apartheid struck me as being absolutely, really ludicrous. I couldn't get my head around the fact that you would have an entire system based on the fact that you are less cause as I say in speech because you're wearing a different jumper or you got a beard or your skin color is different. That literally struck me as palpable non-sense. I remember going over some passage a couple of times, just to try and get my head around that concept.

We're so used to saying oh yes it's terrible but actually think about it. It is preposterous. All this was vivid to me and it was the American civil rights. Here was our kind of version of it in Ireland, coming home and so myself and Foley set about organizing protest parties and stuff. And then the next bit was I just stopped going home and started working with the homeless people in Dublin because all the books I've been reading, which seemed far away in California, or in Chicago with Studs Terkel, or in South Africa were actually in Dublin on the streets.

It was much more interesting than school. That stuff was in my head. And when the Rats started it was a clear agenda. If you listen to the songs, they are all about that sort of stuff. So when I see Buerk in 1984 in the BBC, it's not a million miles of a leap to say I'd respond to it.

[Music]

Owen Barder

You're listening to Development Drums with me Owen Barder. And my guest today is the anti-poverty campaigner Bob Geldof. The highlights of this interview are also available as a Development Drums podcast. If you enjoy Development Drums, you may also enjoy another podcast from the Center for Global Development, the Global Prosperity Wonkcast which is a snappier summary of some of our development policy work. You can subscribe to both Development Drums and the Global Prosperity Wonkcast on iTunes or you can find them on our website at www.cgdev.org. The Guardian Newspaper also has a monthly podcast on development.

Looking back, the money that Band Aid raised, the BBC made this acquisition, which is worth getting on the table, that some of the money that was raised for the Ethiopian Famine, not by Band Aid but by other people, was used in some ways to finance or support the civil war and the armies on both sides. When they made that allegation, they implied that the Band Aid money was connected with that. How confident are you that, A) the Band Aid money was never siphoned off in the way they had suggested and B) that the other money that was raised for Ethiopia was never siphoned off or abused.

Bob Geldof

Well I am so confident of the fact that not a single cent of Band Aid money went anywhere but to the intended recipients, so much so that we were quite prepared to take the BBC on in the High

Court and remember the trustees of Band Aid, we spent so far this year, we've spent £3,000 a day on recipients in Africa, still 28 years later. Same trustees and incredible guys.

Owen Barder

Where is that money coming from, Band Aid?

Bob Geldof

It's still from DVDs or from covenanted wages or from wills or for example last year, Glee, the thing they did "Do They Know It's Christmas? Instantly the downloads were huge. Who would have thought?

Owen Barder

Right.

Bob Geldof

I thought we'd make 100 grand and I'd get out of there. 28 years later, we're spending more than ever intended, but great and it is the source of the greatest satisfaction because it is tangible. You absolutely clearly improve that person's life, that's cool. But the BBC, we just wouldn't let it go. This is the corollary of your thing about people think that you perpetuate the idea of Africa, as I would sneeze. It was. There are areas which are still endemic to drought, war, and the resulting chaos in people's lives.

That will need to continue but until such time things stabilize. But it's not Bob Geldof perpetuating this thing, it's Bob Geldof responding to it. Because of that, because of myself and Bono, we get criticised then for doing it. But if you saw the recent series the white poverty series, I don't think it would have been a series or even a week of poverty had Bono and I not agreed to do the film that started it.

We're stuck and the BBC – and this goes to the whole mess that's in the BBC now. Their journalistic standards because of the web; because of the net; because a lot of what they are doing is now being done extracurricular if you like. The panic in the tabloids is that they moved to illegality and subverting in fact the state by bribing officials. That's the tabloid. The BBC though, dude you're on whole other levels of credibility and journalistic rectitude.

And in amongst the BBC the paragon of that must be the World Service. I have literally sat in basements in Eastern Europe during the communist period and watched people tune in the Romanian service et cetera to get the truth. I've seen rebels in Africa, different sides tuning into their world service to get what they believe is the reality of the situation. To have the World Service use the showbiz bling of Band Aid to draw attention to a problem that may or may not have existed was too much because the whole thing was sold on the fact that it was us involved. It wasn't.

The guy makes it clear and he could have spoken to me and he didn't. And this whole mess happened and we went ballistic because a lot of people trusted us quite rightly and we've never betrayed that trust. The trustees went ballistic. Wrong crowd of people to take on. They are hardcore. One was the chairman of the BBC, the controller of the BBC, the chairman of ITV and the chairman of Channel 4. You shouldn't take on the height of your profession. The end result was of course they were wrong. It was a nonsense. It was a fabrication and the BBC had to apologize to us uniquely in its history across all networks, all foreign networks and on every news broadcast.

Owen Barder

Do you think it did lasting damage, do you think people?

Bob Geldof

I don't think it did lasting damage to us. But it did some damage to them, to the World Service in particular. I found out things I didn't know. The first thing they tried to say was, it's nothing to do with us because the foreign services or the World Service is controlled by the foreign office, that was news to me. I didn't know that. So we had to sue the Foreign Office. But you can't sue the Foreign Office. Mark Thompson was trying to push it off on them.

Then I got a letter saying that this was robust journalism to which we answered with pages of documents from the officials who were there at the time, the British ambassador, the America ambassador, the woman who is Barrack Obama's African advisor who was an independent monitor and who rode the Band Aid trucks. All these people, all these experts you know came and said this is absolute nonsense. Now with regard to the other people I don't know and I can't speak for them, I really can't. I didn't see it.

Owen Barder

You didn't see money being siphoned off?

Bob Geldof

No I didn't. How it couldn't work with Band Aid is we had our own ships, I mean the BBC filmed them endlessly. We had our own trucks; we had our own jeeps. What really sickened me was that we had drivers killed during the war. You were in the middle of the longest running war of the 20th century, we had our drivers killed in our trucks, trying to get food to them.

How does suddenly this stuff get to pay for ops. It was absolutely disgraceful. I can't answer for the others but I never saw anything like that. But maybe who knows.

[Music]

Owen Barder

Before we move onto the future of development policy, let's quickly touch on Make Poverty History in 2005. You set the agenda pretty much for the Gleneagles Summit working with people like Tony Blair and with officials in the government. Famously afterwards you said that it had been a great success. Looking back, do you feel that you might have overstated the success of 2005? Does it...

Bob Geldof

No. In fact I couldn't have known then but I had probably understated this. The turning point, the real turning point or as Kofi Annan called it the Rubicon crossing moment was the Gleneagles Summit. That's when I think and I've actually written this recently the world took Africa seriously for the very first time. The Commission for Africa, is for me it's a big thing. As I've said boringly it's one of the very few things I'm proud of having being involved in.

But it did strip out what needed to happen in Africa, why did it remain outside the global economic wellbeing, why? There must be a reason. These are empirical things, and I drilled down into this with very, very clever people. Now Blair threw me the sop of culture. But culture is really important as Amartya Sen, says the Nobel economist, you can't have development without culture.

I spoke to, who was it, Anthony the guy who wrote the Brandt Report. I sold it to Blair, Brandt was wrong because it never – Brandt didn't work because it was never implemented, it was just shelved. We're going to go forward with this and he agreed and he said, well I'll do the politics you do the public. Going through it on that section, I spent a year of going around setting up different forums in different countries and trolling through Africa very interesting.

Anyway it's a good report. But the other leaders didn't want to do any of its recommendations; double aid, cancel debt. They didn't want to do that. So something had to be done to force them. Now Make Poverty History was already – that was Richard Curtis' overarching name for basically the cooperation of all the NGOs. I'd stay outside that loop, because things happen very slowly with all the NGOs; it's very bureaucratic. I am not. I am chronically impatient to everyone's annoyance.

I am also likely to say things that will embrace them. I don't want them to be embarrassed and I am also likely to disagree with them in public, so that's it. I am pain for them and they are pain for me. They would organize Make Poverty History and as it became clearer and clearer and clearer that this was no threat, whatsoever to the leaders of the GA, none whatsoever, they never heard of it, they couldn't care less because in reality and I know Adrian Lovett, who now works for One, he sort of agrees with me. But the great thing about MPH was that everyone believed it did exist.

It did exist in this country, in Britain, which is consistently behind this agenda, almost to a person in this country. If you argue with them they'd say yes, what the hell. That's led to consistent political policy and the consistency of policy lends results as we can see today. But back then, I just thought what's the focus of MPH, where is its end object and the end object was a march. I don't believe that. You can walk around Trafalgar Square, singing We Shall Overcome till you're blue in the face, you ain't going to do it.

Where do you bring real, terrible word, people power, public power to bear. You put a million people on the streets of a capital city, that's what you do on the day. I really didn't want to do Live Aid, because Live Aid was in people's minds, not in mine because I never really got that, a very romantic moment. There was this sense of the country acting as one, people as one. At the Olympics this year The Times said there has been three great unifying moments in the country. The Coronation of Queen Elizabeth the Second, Live Aid and The Olympics. Not bad. That isn't what I intended but fantastic.

I didn't think you can't go back but Bono and Richard were insistent that we do it, by we I meant I, because I said well you are so up on it you do it and he said oh man, I've got an album to do and Richard had a film. I said well fuck off, what about me because he is the megastar, I am the pop singer, which is true. And so...

Owen Barder

You put together Live Aid which was the concert about 25 years later?

Bob Geldof

It was but the thing is it was substantially different which is why it doesn't remain in people's minds. One, it was far bigger than Live Aid in terms, it had 1,100 artists. You try getting that one together. Two, it was to be now with, the diffusion of the media was now to be in nine cities for the first time bringing African to the loop, with Mandela in Jo'burg. But you had to fill, you had to build public stages across the main thoroughfares in each city and fill it with local and

international artists and get a million people on the street. That was John Kennedy's job to that. And we had no money...

Owen Barder

But the agenda for 2005 was debt, aid and trade.

Bob Geldof

No, it wasn't. Again this is a cardinal mistake. It was debt and aid. Trade specifically till Blair was blue in the face, it was never on the agenda. He said if it's possible I will bring it up but it's not going to be possible because the Doha round is taking place in three weeks' time. It was Hong Kong or Singapore and the leaders will not discuss trade when they are going on to do that there.

Owen Barder

It was debt and aid, that's your...

Bob Geldof

It was debt and aid.

Owen Barder

So mainly then for you...

Bob Geldof

Now, I'm not saying that that was right, I mean I would have put trade on the agenda but unfortunately I wasn't chair of the G8.

Owen Barder

Well that's where I want to take us now is this beyond – what's known as the beyond aid agenda, I mean...

Bob Geldof

Let me just finish because you can edit this as much as you like, so the point about MPH was as I say, it didn't exist in Germany. It didn't exist in America. It didn't exist in France, hence me doing funny things like saying let's repeat Dunkirk, you know do you remember that and so the tabloids went ballistic and I sat in a rowing boat somewhere in some port and said yes we're going to bring them all and let the kids out of school and there was outrage; get it going you know.

Owen Barder

Right.

Bob Geldof

Get the conversation – get them saying he is a twat like what's in the pubs, say yeah great, or the kids going yep. There had to be something to make the country alive to it. So that's what you do and that's my job, it isn't the job of Save The Children and Oxfam, so this thing isn't – this isn't their fault. It's just that that's what I do. And I enjoy it. I like being disruptive.

Owen Barder

Right.

Bob Geldof

So that was fun for me but actually doing Live Aid again there had to be a pointed concerted end to MPH. I know the MPH people say we had 250,000 people on the street in Edinburgh, and you spoiled our protest. How did I spoil it? There was 250,000 people on the street. Not very many people cared about that is the truth. I'm not saying that Live Aid was great. It makes me sound arrogant but this is the reality and 250,000 people on the street will not change things.

They allow you to vent and they're one of the venting processes of democracy and it's great but it did not change things, okay. So if you want to engage, if you want to change things you must engage with the agents of change. And the agents of change in our world are democratically elected politicians. Whether you like it or not, that's where you'll engage, now Oxfam. Save the Children, the others constantly engage. In fact the leaders of those charities now were the advisors to the government.

But MPH for it to work had to have a coherent point over and above a march. And it had to have hoopla around it to make it appear that this was a vital thing. Now a march of 200,000 people is a big march, but I am sick of hearing you spoiled it, we had a big march. I said to them long before I remember the meeting that you know we're going to do it on this stage, say we have the march planned, I said fine then whatsit you know at the concert we'll urge people out on to the march. There was never a divergence of aims. It was a divergence of what was going to be effective.

Owen Barder

I am interested in how you balanced being disruptive as you say and being at the table with the agents of change, the democratic elected governments.

Bob Geldof

Because you are disruptive with the agents of change.

Owen Barder

But it's hard to be both, isn't it, because you don't get invited to the table if you're genuinely disruptive. Did you ever feel a bit co-opted?

Bob Geldof

That's a very good question. You get invited if you've got something to say and you get invited if they can trust you. And if they think you know what you're on about and that's a really good question because when you go and look in 1999 Bono called me and said I am bothered about this debt thing and you know he hadn't called me for ages because he had been busy making his career.

And suddenly calls up and Clare Short had – the Labour party had just come into power I think, I don't know what year that was '97?

Owen Barder

'97, yes.

Bob Geldof

And she called me up within a week and said I want to focus on the debt thing and I said I don't think that will work. It's arcane empirical economic issue. I wouldn't know how to make it work. And then the Drop the Debt people brilliantly made it work so going constant completely against what I said about, you know MPH. And Ann Pettifor in particular, and the crowd Jamie Drummond and Lucy Matthew and those people.

They made it work very well, I mean they liked linking arms around Birmingham town hall, I mean frankly I never heard about it even when it happened but and I don't think that worked either but they began to break the chains of this thing. You know I don't want to sound arrogant about this stuff, it's just that's the truth. And then when Bono called me up, he said let's do another record, another concert. I said that won't work.

He said why not. So I went through why wouldn't it work in my view. And then he said will you meet up with these people so I did and I really thought without being patronizing – massively impressive. I got excited and I could see now that you could do this. But essentially because Bono was now so hugely famous now was – what I always missed with Band Aid and Live Aid was, and what stung me was Paul Vallely of the Times who was always writing about this issue in fact electrified me, you know along with [Michael] Buerk.

Owen Barder

Right.

Bob Geldof

Because he wrote it so well, you could see it.

Owen Barder

He is one of the people who actually went to Ethiopia during the famine originally wasn't he and wrote the story?

Bob Geldof

Great writer. And he stung me by saying not stung me but made me think: "as much as Geldof can do, he is never going to change it if he doesn't engage", but how. Here was this potential lobby of over a billion people for Live Aid and more joining every day. How do you cash that in, how do you bank that politically. So I spoke to Margaret Thatcher a couple of times, who was intellectually engaged with this, but didn't have much interest in it if you understand. Blair had started the Band Aid parliamentary committee when he was a young man in parliament and very much informed him and Brown's politics.

Cameron and Osborne had the day off in Eton to watch Live Aid. So I hadn't quite realized the generational impact. So when Bono said well what should we do with Lucy and Jamie and Zeta and Adrian and Ann Pettifor, the Drop the Debt crowd, I said isn't it the best thing that we form a group that has access to power by formulating policy with very smart people not my thing but very smart people, young, dynamic who got a view on this, we can get it in there. And inform these people, who now watch Live Aid all day, so day that started which became one and that to me is the best thing we've done of all of it that to me is the singular best thing. It's not satisfying unlike Band Aid but it does get a lot done.

Owen Barder

What we haven't succeeded in doing yet is challenging some of the more systematic ways in which rich countries affect poor country, the migration rules, the way our companies behave, the corruption, those kinds of issues. We're doing something kind of nice and pretty to raise some money.

Bob Geldof

But everyone has talked about that since day one, I mean this is how they...

Owen Barder

But what progress have we made? What progress has the campaigning that you've done made on those issues?

Bob Geldof

I would argue a lot. I mean you know as we speak the extractive industries' transparency, Transparency International started by Peter Eigen and he was chair of the EITI. I mean if you talk to Peter, I was with Peter two days ago in Geneva. If you would talk to him and said that the Dodd Frank Act, the Lugar part of that was going to happen almost as he suggested it should 25 years ago. He'd have –

Owen Barder

This is the requirement just so that people know that companies publish.

Bob Geldof

What they pay.

Owen Barder

What they pay.

Bob Geldof

And on a project by project basis, which is critical. So institutionally you are literally affecting vast areas of the economy. And if you do not publish what you pay on a project by project basis, dude, you can't list on the New York Stock Exchange. And all of these big extractive countries absolutely have to raise capital on London, New York and Hong Kong, they have to.

So Europe will follow suit, I've no doubt about it. And that's institutional change. In terms of banking secrecy, well the economic crisis has revealed that. Now that's been stripped down.

Owen Barder

We've made no progress on the trade rules really in the last summit.

Bob Geldof

There hasn't I mean but like Doha has been a bust and I don't know how many times I have to say it. And it becomes even I mean it doesn't matter whether I say it but I am just sick of saying it for you know since Doha, Monterrey and all of the rest of it. And until such time as we take down the CAP and the foreign bill and all the onerous protectionist treaties I mean you know really the EU is a cartel, I mean it is protectionism of the end.

Owen Barder

I want to push you on the idea that those issues which you are rightly passionate about, somehow get crowded out by the image of we're going to raise some money through Make Poverty History or through Live Aid and so on and we're going to give money to poor people.

Bob Geldof

No, but that's wrong and again you are playing that trick, we raised money through Live Aid, through Make Poverty History we raised the issues. And so that's the key difference. Live Aid we needed to get money instantly and to draw attention to the potential death of 30 million people. Now dude even now, if you ask me, Bob, number one, should we immediately start stripping down the institutions or should we instantly try and stop 30 million.

Well the first thing is to stop the 30 million. And so by making this big hoo-ha the powers move to try and prevent that, that's first. With the lobby created by Live Aid you then go to try and push the political envelope but it took 20 years, one for the issue to become the norm in political circles, a vital one. And then as globalization happened anyway through new media then it became even more critical.

So trade barriers began to fall in certain ways but never against Africa so why, what, so in 2003 you say can you go through this and find out what is the logic behind this. That was the commission. Now we've come through that, let's make it official G8 policy starting with the first thing doubling aid and the second thing institutionally doing away with unpayable debt of the poorest countries.

So you start, you begin to unpick gradually, you can't just say this that and the other. You pick, unpick, unpick, unpick. And it will happen and as Africa grows as a result in my view of the G8 in 2005, doubling, cancellation of debt critical. So we know the figures, how many children went to school, et cetera, et cetera. Doubling of aid 62% of that was achieved, is that important? Hugely important. Two other factors since 2005, massive amounts of Chinese investment to power the globalized world into Africa and fourthly and most importantly and critically something that I think has bemused the community so to speak has been mobile connectivity.

The distribution of mobile phones is the single greatest factor in the economic takeoff of Africa. So once you add more aid, occurring at as I said the very base level of society are and being able to enlarge capacity in African governments. Married to huge inward investment from the Chinese and can I say Britain's foreign investment is 20 times that of Germany, 20 times, four times that of United States. So Britain is in there, competing.

But you have this massive inward investment stabilizing the community, you began to get traction. And post war in Africa, this is vast. Again I come back to that because you must understand I know the development people do but really understand it, 11 cities of no more than 100,000 people in Africa post-war. So the distances were so vast with no infrastructure that they couldn't trade.

Now with connectivity, you have virtual infrastructure. They began to talk. They began to trade. There was cash around, governments where they were receiving capacity funding had an ability to manage this slightly. You began to get traction. So that's what's going on and once you get economic traction and growth, you get the building of institutions which will become more powerful I mean as we all know and it's boring negotiating these things for Africans it's difficult, one, capacity and two, the other side won't listen they have all the power.

But as the power moves, as the Irish says as they begin to hop the balls, they've got options. It's shifting. And when you have Wal-Mart investing at 2.8 billion and you get PepsiCo setting up smoothie factories in Addis, you get shifts in institutions. So there is no use going in top down say the world systems have to change or else everything is useless. That's ridiculous and frankly it's very undergraduate.

[Music]

Owen Barder

So we've now got 2013 the UK once again takes the chair of the G8, I think for the first time since 2005. If you were advising as I am sure you are, if you are advising people at number 10, what should the G8 focus on in 2013?

Bob Geldof

I am not advising because like I don't – I can't advise, I am not expert enough. What I will go in and say is there is the ability, you know I mean there is the – if I saw these guys at the very beginning, there was no guidance. I just bust these things so I'd go and see a leader. And I'd have a list of eight things and I'd make sure that people know I was seeing an advisor, so post Live Aid it's rah rah rah. So the media are going to come.

Five of them were impossible but I wanted them. Two were viable but difficult. One was a certainty. They had to give me something, that sounds like big head to please was nothing to do with me, it was to do with the profile and the fact the media were outside the door. And so you'd get something from all of these meetings and that's the thing you must get something from them or else what's the point.

Owen Barder

So what's your list of aid for 2013?

Bob Geldof

I don't have a list of aid, certainly the need now is to get the British government over the line with the point seven agreement. This will be historic, I mean genuinely for people who are listening that you know and maybe you've passed on already assuming that we're going to get the positive, but think about it. In the worst economic time, this government of all governments is holding their feet to the fire. We've got to get them over that line in the face of massive attacks from people who argue emotionally rather than practically.

There is no question that for Britain this consistency is the best use they've ever had of soft power. And the cost is utterly negligible. If you are thinking of building a couple of aircraft carriers fine, that's cool but in the modern world what are they going to do for you. But in the modern world, the small pop of 0.7, which is what £1.30 is it per person, sorry 1p?

Owen Barder

It's less than a penny for every pound of national income.

Bob Geldof

Yes, so what do we get from it vast, we get huge. We get massive influence in the continent that will by 2040 absolutely be amongst the polar economic places in the planet. There is just no question of that, maybe before then. So you get a big say our business people as I say at 20% foreign direct investment, sorry 20 times more than Germany, this is great stuff for Britain. Not only that, it's what the British people decided to do on a long haul crusade and it's been part of our job and the others to keep everyone alerted to it and frankly most people go along with it still.

So that's the first priority to get to there. That leadership should it happen will probably trigger a response from the others. So we've got to now make sure that it does. We're going to try some bread and circus stuff. There isn't much appetite for it in this current climate. I am always skeptical of it anyway does it work but holding arms around the Birmingham town hall seemed to have an effect. The march at Edinburgh, you know people who took part in it amazing, that's a lot of people. The million people who showed out in the streets of Berlin and Paris and Rome and Philadelphia and London and Tokyo etcetera. That worked.

So yes it does work. We'll be pushing obviously for the extractives bills to go through Europe, to stop Europe cutting its aid the usual stuff but what the overarching arguments about institutions

and stuff, it follows from these, because if you alter the stock exchange and you alter the institutions that are being built in Africa and really Africa needs institutions because you cannot get coherence in a state without the institutions but you will not get institutions if the state is weak.

Institutions often are organic unto themselves. The law takes place around what society is doing. And institutions form around that.

Owen Barder

Do you ever worry that foreign intervention undermines those institutions that by providing aid in some way that we.

Bob Geldof

No, because aid is too tiny for it to prevent it.

Owen Barder

Even in countries that are highly dependent places like Rwanda and Ethiopia, that receive a large proportion of aid.

Bob Geldof

I would argue that but this aid dependency thing is a complete myth, again it's the naysayers, I mean dependent on Rwanda? No. They'd take a body blow but I mean while they are trying to build their institutions and you could argue that [Paul] Kagame has done a good job of parliament etcetera, etcetera. And you also have you know what he's being messing around within the Congo.

Owen Barder

So do you think it was the right decision for the British government –

Bob Geldof

Yes, I do.

Owen Barder

To stop aid to Kagame?

Bob Geldof

Yes, I do I mean it isn't the end of the world, what is it, 27 million. But it makes sure I mean Britain has been a good friend but the thing is that you know is it right to interfere, no, but it's probably right to withdraw and to show your displeasure and say this can't be serious. You know you've got to be serious but how can you argue for stability in institution building which you've achieved, how can you argue for the state, the country overriding ethnic rivalries which is true. Again it's to my point when the state can provide benefit over and above the immediacy of clan and tribe then you get a loyalty to that. You see that constantly, you see it in our world.

Owen Barder

What about another country that we both know well and love Ethiopia where we know that aid is being used well but we also see worrying features about the way the government for example manages civil society. Do you have – at what point should the British government think about suspending aid to Ethiopia? What would they need to do?

Bob Geldof

I think they've got to manage the country to an economic state where it's not – where the government feel confident whatever political system they so choose onto themselves or the people decide what political system they want. They feel confident enough that that they are less afraid of civil society, I mean it goes so much against the grain of what the government want to do. It's this constant thing with Meles Zenawi highly intellectual political brain. And yet he did the most preposterously naïve things.

I mean it just didn't factor with the person. And constantly you would argue against the detention of journalists or civic society or what's the problem with NGOs, they're telling us what their interfering in our country and stuff like that. There is too many of them. Yes, but you know that's diminishing returns, you know where the country is stable and economically growing. NGOs are no longer necessary, et cetera, et cetera. So you're constantly engaged in these arguments. You never get close or you get close enough so you can engage them openly, I mean really openly and all that that implies.

Owen Barder

But there are lots of people who worry that we – while you have governments that are grappling with these things and sometimes coming up with what seem to us not only naïve answers but really quite dangerous answers that we should not be giving aid to those countries that just as you say we agree that we should.

Bob Geldof

It depends on how egregious it is, I mean you know I mean there is such a double standard applied to Africa as the Africans themselves constantly argue, we beg and we grovel towards the Chinese. 13% GDP corruption, so people always ask about corruption.

Owen Barder

We're not giving them aid, right?

Bob Geldof

Well we were.

Owen Barder

We were, okay.

Bob Geldof

Until a couple of years ago, we were giving India aid and still are until a couple of months from now. And we have full diplomatic relations and here is an autocratic society unto the nth or government to the nth, complete human right deniers, won't have it at all, utterly corrupt in their business practices, commercial laws whatever they decide it is that day. We begged to get in. We say nothing, why? Because it's in the interest of UK limited or whatever it's called.

Owen Barder

But the existence of double standards is not a reason to do the wrong thing if people, I mean I was interested that you think it's a good idea to suspend aid to Rwanda?

Bob Geldof

Yes, I do.

Owen Barder

So it does suggest that there's some level at which you think we have the obligation to send the right signal.

Bob Geldof

It doesn't make any, so you got to remember.

Owen Barder

See obligations in the end.

Bob Geldof

It doesn't make any difference to them they are not aid dependent. Who is aid dependent at the moment?

Owen Barder

If it doesn't make any difference to them why are we giving them aid?

Bob Geldof

Because they are not aid dependent but they require aid.

Owen Barder

Okay.

Bob Geldof

There is a huge difference.

Owen Barder

But no, what my worry is that if the aid is making a difference and we've suspended it then that must be doing somebody, somewhere, some harm?

Bob Geldof

It is doing harm but it's mainly doing harm to the ability of the government to function within that society in a coherent way that enables growth and development.

Owen Barder

Okay.

Bob Geldof

And that is not a good thing but the amount of aid we give at 27 million is not going to break the Rwandan bank, nor is it going to make them stop misbehaving in The Congo where the upside of that is far greater than 27 million we have. But you know.

Owen Barder

This somewhat connects us to David Cameron's story of the Golden Thread, this idea that there are certain institutions that every country needs to have if there are to be successful thriving economies.

Bob Geldof

Well that's a good idea, I mean I keep thinking of Rumpole's Golden Thread unfortunately when I hear of it but you know.

Owen Barder

But you're broadly sympathetic to this idea that we ought to be advocating for these kinds of institutions to be there.

Bob Geldof

I really think that the lack of institutions is a huge problem and to the world development movement's point and I agree with them that the institutions we have what are purposefully set up to benefit us even if we didn't specifically target weaker countries though sometimes we specifically did. They have to be taken down particularly given the current economic crisis we find ourselves in. It is only through trading, fair trade that we equalized these things. So yes, institutions. I've just come back from the Africa progress panel.

Owen Barder

This is the Kofi Annan chaired panel.

Bob Geldof

Which was a function of the commission for Africa, you know that these things have to be monitored and we spent a day listening to experts and I don't even put that in inverted commas, I mean their expertise is just fantastic and you would think I'd be bored of this stuff now but it isn't the twattery of some of the people we've mentioned, – but you know this is crap this is – shut up. I mean we're talking about real serious you know in their expertise and you listen to a day of this.

And largely the talk was you know around the extractive industries etcetera, etcetera but it led instantly to the lack of institutions or to institution building. And all that they talked about in the end came down to how is any of this possible without leadership, without proper leadership and there is such a dearth of it in Africa. And that is a result of lack of institutions.

If you have a disinterested civil service, one of the key institutions to just the capacity to manage a country, its growth, its development, its law service, where do you go but if you can't pay the civil service or is if there is a civil service beholden to one group in society so even things as simple as this but it isn't any use for one NGO a think-tank NGO, a theoretical NGO to start going on and on unless you pull apart the thing. How do institutions get built. How can they get deconstructed so they don't do harm to the local. All those things need to be looked at. Boring, time-consuming but political.

Owen Barder

Not boring I think.

Bob Geldof

It will only happen if you engage at a certain level in politics where you lay out policy, where you can unpick it and disentangle it and say there is no downside to this, in fact look it's upside. So even still today the Common Agricultural Policy which was so egregious to the British in 1984, 1985 was part of the killer in '84, '85 and still is, you know and still is a vital argument last week with the European budget this has to be taken down. So it is institutionalized.

We are loathe to take apart our institutions in equal proportion to how difficult it is to build them in poor countries, but it is the function of all this and if you talk about the last 28 years from a personal point of view, it is about that it is about development and growth are part and parcel of institutionalization.

Owen Barder

Finishing up, you talked about the last 28 years from a personal point of view, presumably you didn't imagine that this would be something you did for the next 28 years.

Bob Geldof

No, it bores me to death.

Owen Barder

So what is it about – because lot of other people who got involved in celebrity pop songs and things have done their pop song and moved on. And you've stuck with it. What is it – what still draws you into this, why are you still involved in this issue? Why haven't you just walked away?

Bob Geldof

Because you can see things changing. Were it just futile, you just stop I mean you bang your head against a brick wall eventually you've just got mushy forehead. But it turned out the brick wall is malleable. It was made of some other material and so you push, you push, you articulate it and that's the only advantage that we have. You articulate it. Speak truth unto power without question. Speak truth about power to those who need to be told about it.

And so you know people say you're compromised, no, I am not. I haven't once been compromised. I would say exactly what I believe to whomever. And if you don't like it, cool. I mean the common currency must be: Fucking get off of telly you, what a cunt. Yeah, he's a cunt but I mean fair enough, you know I mean that's got to be it. Part of the job is to provoke arguments in the pub, I mean literally people get bored of me saying are they – how do we get them to talk or how do we get them involved in the pub.

You get in a rowboat and you pretend you're going to row people over from – millions of Germans and French are going to descend on Edinburgh, of course they're not but you know people laugh and so you get them talking. And it is that, it becomes vital. It goes into the home. I remember School Aid. The issue was to get it into a kitchen. Get it into a kitchen so you see the connection between Hull and Harare, get it in the kitchen. So that's it. And that's what we do, you know we talk about it. We articulate hopefully sensibly arcane issues that only remain inside the sort of developmental vacuum and within the developmental vacuum is to try and make the argument less than the echo chamber of your own prejudices.

Owen Barder

Bob Geldof, thanks for coming on Development Drums.

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