

Collaboration is the **KEY** to the Future.

By Simón Menéndez Sadornil, 29



Africa is both one of my greatest passions and greatest concerns. Four years ago, I co-founded *Asociación Hechos* (“Do Something” in English) and we began

our work to provide education and employment opportunities for unaccompanied immigrant minors from Africa. These children and their families were fleeing from Africa to Spain on small boats called *cayucos*, risking their lives over hundreds of miles of ocean. Their hope was to “strike gold” in Europe. Their dream: to access greater economic opportunities. Yet for the thousands of these immigrants who come from Africa every year, their dream too often becomes a nightmare.

To understand and even stop this influx of immigrants from Africa, we need to understand the unique history of the continent, starting with those who are best able to tell that story. In the Igbo language there is a word, *Nkali*, which means in English “to be bigger than another”—in the sense of having more power. The history of Africa—following this meaning of ‘*Nkali*’—is a story that should be told by those who have the power to write it: Africans themselves. But all too often, we hear instead from the colonial establishment—which speaks only of the failures of African society. We hear too from Dambisa Moyo, an African economist and author of *Dead Aid* who writes that the aid from Western countries is killing Africa. She rejects the pleas of Western celebrities, such as Bono or Bob Geldof, to mobilize direct aid to Africa. She goes on to say that

the millions in aid sent to Africa every year have not only made the poor poorer, but in some cases have been used for military purposes, which only adds to the violence and suffering.

Yet despite all of the challenges, there is still a palpable feeling in Africa that possibilities for real change are on the horizon. Local activists and the business elite are pressuring their governments to lead in a positive direction. Some African leaders have responded with concrete, progressive strategies. I believe in the message being transmitted by many people and organizations about Africa’s new chapter of greater prosperity. Africa’s citizens have the right to create the future they want. And for this to happen, justice—not charity—needs to be the cornerstone of that change.

On this side of the Mediterranean, back here in Spain, a new movement has broken out that also promises positive change. Instead of choosing to engage in the usual anti-government and anti-immigrant riots, the intention of this movement is to be peaceful and civil, to talk and reflect on what constitutes a democracy. Law enforcement officials don’t know how to respond to us. They have been paralyzed. In just one week this past spring, the youth, the elderly, immigrants—everyone from across Spain and Europe—came together in the streets. They did not identify with the traditional roles that they’d been assigned in this game of democracy. United, they wanted to start a debate about broader issues like

unemployment, the unfair treatment of immigrants, inadequate housing, the lack of political involvement and the loss of dignity.

In Spain, as in most developed countries, the political agenda is democracy. Across the sea, in Africa, the political agenda is dictatorship. On the surface they have nothing in common, but underneath, they have everything in common. People everywhere are calling for greater democratic involvement and a more ethical future. They are pleading to change the rules of democracy—now controlled by economic interests.

What will be the final chapter of this story and our role in it? Will the “West,” which boasts civic and humanistic values, allow Africa to shine with its own light, while at the same time supporting its process of growth? Or will the African continent be devoured once again by our “precious” democracies and by our supposed “help?” I believe the key is collaboration—some call it “co-capitalism”—in

which giving back to society is fundamental. To witness Africa’s growth is certainly encouraging. But, if we stand together, something even more wonderful will happen on the African continent. Collaboration is the key to the future—for all of us. **Y**

“...despite all of the challenges, there is still a palpable feeling in Africa that possibilities for real change are on the horizon.”

Simón Menéndez Sadornil, a YouthActionNet Fellow from 2010 who lives in Castilla y Leon, Spain, co-founded Asociación Hechos (“Do Something”) in 2007 to provide housing, social services and job training opportunities for immigrant minors and other at-risk youth.

