



*A documentary by Chew on it productions
in partnership with WORLDwrite*

Press Release

***Corruptababble*: new film ridicules "corruption" obsession**

Chew on it productions in partnership with the charity WORLDwrite are delighted to announce the launch of their latest documentary *Corruptababble* at the Battle of Ideas festival, held at the Royal College of Art on 28th October 2007 in London.

Shot in the UK, the film challenges the prevailing obsession with corruption in Africa. Complete with satirical moments, the film suggests that allegations of corruption and assumptions that poverty is sustained by criminal activity across the globe are nonsense and only serve as excuses for the lack of development.

The film follows the journey of Yolanda Mufweba and Brendon Sissing, two young South Africans who, on a visit to the UK, are appalled by demeaning portrayals of Africa as a continent ruined by robbery and crime. They decide to make a film and interrogate the views of all sides – from anti-G8 protesters to well-known free marketers – to assess the scale of what they see as pure prejudice. The corruption obsession, Yolanda says, is "hammering Africa and undermining its development prospects". They are determined to unravel the "babble".

Director Ceri Dingle says:

"Brendon and Yolanda are truly inspiring subjects and young filmmakers. Their feisty approach and relentless investigation made this film a pleasure to make and an eye opener. It seems that all sides have swallowed the notion that Africa is suffering from an invisible global crime wave. There can be no doubt, as the young pair discover, that the "corruptababble" tells us more about political cynicism than what is really happening in Africa. The mockumentary moments in the film bring to life a healthier way of dealing with corruption obsessions, that is, to just not take them seriously. Corruption allegations provide a convenient excuse for denying political autonomy and withholding resources. For our peers to enjoy the development we take for granted they need to at least be treated with the trust we afford ourselves and allowed to manage their own affairs."

Producer Vivien Regan adds:

"The Battle of Ideas is the perfect festival for the premiere of this insightful documentary. The film testifies to the all embracing power of ideas, which can damn and degrade people's opportunities if left unchallenged. *Corruptababble* represents an ideological battle and one that Chew on it productions and WORLDwrite believe is vital to take on."

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Synopses

Short Synopsis *(50 words)*

Is poverty caused by thieving politicians, third world gangsters and a global crime-wave? No, but our obsession with corruption in Africa is endemic. So say Brendon and Yolanda, two young South Africans who are sick of the finger pointing. This powerful documentary suggests it is time to ditch the corruptababble.

Full Synopsis *(235 words)*

Corruption! The allegation trips off the lips of commentators across the board, especially in discussion of the poorest parts of the world. Are corrupt greedy regimes and war lords so widespread? Should developing countries be monitored and measured for their application of "good governance" to stem corrupt tendencies? Is poverty the product of third world gangsters, thieving politicians and corporate fraudsters? No, but our obsession with corruption is endemic. So say Brendon and Yolanda, two young South Africans who, on their first visit to the UK, are told by newfound workmates that "living in such a corrupt country must be awful". The youngsters are appalled and decide to unravel the babble that they see as wrong, ridiculous and racist.

Apparently, just because there is little evidence, doesn't mean a "culture of corruption" isn't spreading. Even Geldof could "feel it out there - the evil" as he travelled on a UN boat downriver through the Congo. The film suggests corruption is the perfect moral panic, a product of political cynicism rather than a global crime wave. Like most moral panics, the obsession and fear do more damage than the thing we are supposed to worry about. The incessant babble about corruption demonises developing countries and justifies so much interference that poor countries hardly have a chance to run their own affairs. The film concludes it is time to trust our fellow man and ditch the corruptababble.

Background: The Making of *Corruptababble* By Director Ceri Dingle

In 2005 as the Live8 concerts pulled wristband-wearing crowds for the cost of a text message and Geldof called for a million people to descend on Edinburgh for the G8 meeting at Gleneagles (less than a few thousand turned up) we set out with two angry young South Africans to examine the babble about corruption in Africa and to question it. To coincide with the Live8-G8 events the Telegraph newspaper published a YouGov poll on Africa's problems. 79% felt corrupt and incompetent African governments had contributed most to Africa's problems, only 1% claimed to be very confident that donated money would be spent wisely, whilst 55% approved of Bob Geldof and his concerts and 53% believed outside agencies, NGOs and richer countries are best placed to solve Africa's problems. This telling survey could perhaps be written off as reflective of the Telegraph reader's views, yet as the film shows these same sentiments were expressed by the G8 protestors themselves. Our research and film shoots certainly revealed the extent to which corruption has become a contemporary obsession which, it seems, may be doing the most harm. As Yolanda puts it in the film, Africa is "getting a hammering" with these allegations.

The background to an obsession

The idea that corruption is the main reason for continuing poverty in much of the world, particularly in Africa, has become an almost unquestioned truth in any discussion on development. Corruption, which is defined as the misuse of public funds for private gain, is now the central focus of the "good governance" agenda promoted by donor agencies and international financial institutions (IFIs) such as the World Bank. As Lindsay Whitfield usefully outlines in her paper 'Aid's political consequences', donor countries, IFIs and aid agencies now regularly set targets for improving governance and rooting out corruption, and have linked these reforms to the disbursement of aid, loans and foreign investment. In fact the failures in the 1980s of structural adjustment programmes to produce sustained economic growth were explained by international agencies – and in particular the World Bank – as the product of a "crisis of governance" (governance in World Bank terms, meaning the relationship between state, market and civil society). The Bank's perspective on the role of the state within developing countries throughout the nineties shifted from the eighties emphasis on "rolling back the state" to seeing it as a key player in social and economic development under exacting Western tutelage.¹

Having privatised key industries and enforced massive cuts in public spending, governments in the poorest countries had, it was argued, failed to grow and reduce poverty due to "vested interests" (read: corrupt politicians backing predatory elites within public sector strongholds). Similarly they had failed to win over their populations to these policies and were suffering from a "democratic deficit". These governments simply could not be trusted to care for their people, and their electorates were deemed incapable of calling them to account. In other words, the governments of poor countries – having swallowed the West's structural adjustment austerity medicine, making thousands unemployed – couldn't get public backing for IMF and World Bank policies and were instead letting these institutions take the blame.

The World Bank's unpopularity and legitimacy problems contributed to their shift to what has become known as a "pro poor" agenda, with "good governance" a key priority. In effect they shifted the blame back to poor countries' governments for their own failed policies. NGOs piled in to help, with a newfound mission to build civil society and "give the poor a voice". Resources poured in for "capacity building" projects and patronising "participatory empowerment and advocacy projects" on behalf of the poor. The poor needed to learn to blame their own governments for their plight. To account for paltry handouts they were required to build village-level

monitoring committees and report to unelected NGOs and Western donors. With Western grants and sponsorship the unelected "good people" of the aid and charity world were only too willing to help "empower" the poor to deal with their democratically elected government "villains" and to act as the conduit for funds.

As international financial institutions shifted towards this apparently pro poor agenda, with even greater prescription and even less financial input, the finger could now be more easily pointed at African governments as the ones to blame. The lack of growth and serious development could now be accounted for; independence, it was argued, had spawned predatory elites who had devoured and squandered resources. In fact development as we know it in the West was no longer deemed an appropriate course for poor countries. It became popular to argue that Western levels of development were not only impossible but undesirable, breeding greed and corruption and exacerbating inequality. Belief in the developing world catching up had apparently been a mistake, as these poor countries weren't up to the task, couldn't handle it, and in any case it would do enormous damage to their culture and way of life, not to mention the environment.

Blaming Africa

The corruption/good governance agenda conveniently explained Africa's lack of development as a problem internal to Africa. To this day it continues to be used as an excuse for North-South inequality. The assumption behind allegations of corruption is of course that huge amounts of aid and funds have been poured into Africa in the first place. In truth, the total amount of aid to African countries in the last fifty years amounts to very little. Estimates suggest that 60-80% of aid even in 2005 was destined for Western consultants and overpriced technical advisors and operatives; very little even goes to the countries themselves.² Yet no amount of aid, it is claimed, would have ever made an impact anyway, as it was being siphoned off by corrupt dictators, irresponsible governments and unaccountable regimes. Former aid advisor for DFID (the UK's Department for International Development) Giles Bolton, in his book *Poor Story*, produces a "Cut-out-and-keep guide to corruption" in an attempt to allay fears of widespread corruption in Africa, yet even his own comments exemplify the demeaning sentiment that only the West has the moral authority to be judge and jury: "Systemic aid's biggest difficulty is not the direct threat of corruption, it's the political risk of supporting governments that turn out in various ways not to be truly committed to their country's interests – what donors broadly call governance."³

Africa's lack of industry, low levels of productivity and inability to compete within the world economy, as well as the complete dearth of investment, a massive fall in aid from the 1960s onwards and the devastating impact of Western intervention can all be ignored, because according to the Corruptababble, Africa's problems are ultimately internal. The corruption agenda conveniently displaces the West's accountability for its disastrous development policies, a point Barrie Collins makes eloquently in the film. The corruption obsession reinforces a notion that Western benevolence has been great but sorely abused. This is a fantasy which fits the West's image of itself.

The collapse of politics

The preoccupation with corruption and good governance must also be seen against the backdrop of a collapse in political belief. This is true within Africa and the West. The collapse of competing ideas of social change globally, the end of nationalist politics and pan-African vision, the pandering to donor recipes and regulation and development failure have all no doubt helped turn people off politics within poor countries. Within the West growing cynicism, distrust, apathy and disbelief in thoroughgoing change has created a vacuum within which personal behaviour issues, the ways in which politicians conduct their affairs and assumptions of hidden

agendas and dodgy dealings dominate political life. In the absence of a broader vision and inspiring political leadership it is hardly surprising that this distrust now dominates political affairs at a global level. As Daniel Ben Ami has argued:

Rather than the prevalence of corruption making people cynical about politics, the inability of politics to project a positive image fuelled an obsession with corruption. Whereas politics once centred on competing visions of how to organise society today it has become a dull technical affair.⁴

Those who do "get into politics" are assumed to be making a career move rather than exercising a belief in social change. With the collapse of politics it is hardly surprising that, in countries where the majority of the population live in abject poverty, assumptions of corruption have caught on. Having a job and owning a car are enough to raise questions of nepotism and dubious activity. As Brendon points out in the film, in the West we simply can't believe that Africans in the developing world can "make it", and those who do are assumed to have probably been up to no good.

The corruption obsession does the damage

The complete dearth of evidence that corruption is more or less prolific than it has ever been also suggests that what is new is our obsession with it. There is also no evidence of any correlation between levels of development and corruption. In fact, far from corruption holding back development and keeping people poor, the opposite may equally be read from the figures. As Yolanda suggests in the film, China features way down as "unclean" on Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index and Bribery Propensity tables, yet the nation's growth in the last ten years and capacity to deliver millions from poverty is unprecedented. In 2007 Denmark has the number one spot as least corrupt, according to Transparency International. The UK is ranked at number 12, the Chinese are still very naughty down at number 72 and Somalia is at the bottom.⁵

The perception of corruption may tell us little about a country's development, but the obsession with corruption can certainly do damage. It justifies ever greater levels of interference and regulation and in so doing further undermines democracy and development. The corruption agenda provides donor countries and agencies with the legitimacy and credentials to wade in to domestic political processes in developing countries, prescribe policies and enforce transparency and accountability to the West. This can only undermine domestic political processes, making governments accountable to Western institutions rather than their public.

This view of Africa as an unethical and incompetent continent in constant need of Western supervision is perpetuated by everyone from the Bono-Geldof bandwagon to free market stalwarts. It directly impacts on aid flows and investment and justifies ever greater aid conditionalities. Few in the West questioned the draconian conditions applied to debt relief for example, since it was assumed that when it comes to helping the poor the "West knows best". Stuart Simpson argues that, in fact, debt relief was based on a moral agenda since the idea of "odious debt" is in fact a moral category that has come to take on pseudo-economic meaning. He points out in his study that a view of developing world governments as incompetent debt addicts is not only to be found within the governments of the G8 but also from their critics:

The Jubilee Debt Campaign argues that debt has either been pushed upon developing countries or taken out by dictatorial or incompetent regimes. These are dangerous assumptions that paint a contemptuous picture of developing countries. Namely that developing countries are unable to govern their own affairs – they lack the sophistication and expertise needed; the governments and

officials of developing countries are corrupt and cannot be trusted; and that the failure of development is a consequence of vast sums going to waste. But above all, the most damaging charge levelled by these critics is that developing countries have had access to too much cash.⁶

In the name of greater transparency and accountability, donor countries and agencies now not only limit the cash available to the poorest countries but effectively run their economies. Donors in Tanzania for example require the government to provide detailed accounts of their planned national budgets for donor approval before the budget has been approved by the Tanzanian Parliament. This restricts the ability of parliament to influence the budgeting process and means that government spending is pre-determined in line with donor priorities rather than on the basis of local and national realities. In Ghana World Bank officials have an office in the finance ministry and the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) consultants regularly sit in on parliamentary committees. The fact that these unelected intruders can interfere without question is both extraordinary and salutary. They are there, it is assumed, because they know best and can be trusted, unlike the elected politicians of these countries.

The West is just as bad?

Many campaigners of course find the corruptababble finger pointing at Africa distasteful but the often heard argument that "the West is just as bad" doesn't help. The Mea Culpa argument of those seeking to defend the developing world from the hammering it gets in the West whenever aid or development is discussed may be well meaning, but sadly it is as backward as maliciously pointing the finger at Africa. This "we are all just as bad" argument not only misses the real problems holding back development but digs a deeper anti-political hole in which pessimism and distrust festers. This can only make matters worse for the developing world. If no one can be trusted to do anything then the future is bleak indeed.

The perfect contemporary panic

The anti-corruption agenda serves as the perfect contemporary panic. It has all the right ingredients, it is apparently endemic but invisible, it suggests anyone in politics is a potential criminal and no one except the politically untainted (and unelected, ideally celebrities) can be trusted. It upholds and reinforces notions of Western superiority and moralistic grandstanding by modern day missionaries who are accountable to no one, whilst demeaning autonomy and democracy and justifying new levels of regulation, interference and control. The corruption obsession should be given no credence; its part in development discourse cannot be taken seriously. Rightly ridiculed in our film, it is no more than childish babble.

Notes

1. See Whitfield, Lindsay, 'Aid's Political Consequences: The Embedded Aid System in Ghana', October 2006. A GEG working paper. Oxford University.
2. 2005 Real Aid Report by Action Aid.
3. Bolton, Giles, *Poor Story: An insider uncovers how globalisation and good intentions have failed the world's poor*, (London: Ebury Press, 2007).
4. 'It's cynicism that is corrupting politics' by Daniel Ben Ami. Source: Spiked Online
5. Transparency International Corruption Perception Index 2007. Source: Transparency International
6. 'Debt and Development: Ghana - A Case Study' by Stuart Simpson. A WORLDwrite paper.

Production Information

Production Company

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Production notes

Original format: DV CAM
Online edit: Avid Express Pro
Digital cut format: Mini DV, DV CAM, Digibeta & DVD PAL (all regions) & DVD NTSC
Aspect Ratio: 4:3
Running Time: 42:21
Completion Date: October 2007

Contributors (in order of appearance)

Brendon Sissing	Filmmaker and WORLDwrite volunteer
Yolanda Mufweba	Journalist and WORLDwrite volunteer
Kim Dunn	Director, Equisave Scotland
Leon Louw	South African Lawyer and Author
Prof. Deepak Lal	Professor of Int. Dev. Studies, University of California, USA
Dr. Piotr Kaznacheev	Adviser to the Administration of the Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin
James Shikwati	Director, Inter Region Economic Network, Kenya
Tsedal Tesfamarian	WORLDwrite volunteer
Martin Krause	Dean of ESEADE University, Argentina
Laurence Cockcroft	Director, Transparency International
Barrie Collins	Researcher, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London

Cast

The following WORLDwrite volunteers formed the cast for the satirical vignettes:

Ben Lotz	Arms dealer
Della Praia Canguya	Robber, arms dealer, brothel client, diamond dealer and warlord's henchman
Andy Hirst	Arms dealer and fraudster
Max Tchimanga	Pimp and fraudster
India Rose Gebler	Prostitute and white slave
Adelard Nibigira	African warlord and king
Luiz Sena	Robber
Niall Crowley	Chauffeur
Junaid Faizullah	Drug baron
Hugh Peto	Drug dealer and diamond buyer

With special thanks to the numerous individuals who contributed interviews and comments in Edinburgh, Stirling and Wood Green, London.

Crew

Ceri Dingle	Director
Viv Regan	Producer
Yolanda Mufweba	Assistant Director
Sadhvi Sharma	Assistant Producer
Rachel James	Assistant Producer
Esme Young	Assistant Producer
Brendon Sissing	Cinematography and Camera
Andy Hirst	Cinematography and Camera
Ian Foster	Cinematography and Camera
Junaid Faizullah	Additional Camera Work
Max Tchimanga	Additional Camera Work
Lexzecia Cayneeo	Sound
Helen Sewell	Production Assistant and Research
Alice Buckee	Research and Development
Nathalie Rothschild	Research and Development
Hugh Peto	Research and Development
Ceri Dingle	Editor
Sandra Carvalho	Vignette Editor
Balint Tusor	Online Editor
Andy Doyle	Post-production Sound Engineer
Kyle Duncan	Web Design
Nathan Furlonge	Graphic Design
Federica Marcello	Graphic Design Assistant
Athanasia Pappas	Post-production Assistant
Angela Kolongo	Post-production Assistant
Carol Dodsworth	Film Logging
Asmita Damania	Film Logging
Keresha Thomas	Film Logging
Franklina Grahl	Film Logging

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