

There are plenty of reasons to criticise Bob Geldof's Live8 plans.

The main target is helping Africa and yet, at the London gig, not a single Black British, African or Caribbean artist features on the bill announced so far. Neither was there a non-white face on the platform of celebs to launch the string of concerts. It would be easy to cast the plans as the guilty white man coming to rescue of those darkies again - people whose own leaders too often line their own pockets with our well-intentioned aid money and crush their desire for democracy.

It is also true that those pictures of dying children with distended stomachs and empty eyes undermine the confidence of a continent that was the birthplace of our species and cradle to our most dominant religions and earliest scholarship. And it is true that an entire industry of aid agencies has grown up to compete for our loose change. We should never forget that the helpers need those they help.

However, despite these flaws and problems, I'd still give Bob Geldof more than his knighthood: I'd retire Her Majesty and stick him on a throne instead because, for every one of these criticisms, there are millions of reasons to support what he is doing. In fact, there are more than ten million reasons. That is the number of children who die of hunger and preventable diseases each year.

I know that his concerts aren't going to end that. Even the G8 group of the richest nations on Earth can't eradicate poverty and disease completely. Ultimately Africans must do that, but we can do is hand back some of wealth we have gained at their expense and remove the barriers that we put in the path of their recovery.

We dump cheap goods on Africa, goods that are cheap because the US and the EU give their farmers millions each year. African farmers can't compete with the high-volume, industrialised agriculture, yet they are the economic backbone of their villages, undermine them and you undermine whole communities.

What these farmers do export is also taxed by industrialised nations to make homegrown goods a better buy. This practice costs poor countries two dollars for every dollar that they get in aid.

That is why the Make Poverty History campaign that King Bob is supporting is asking not just for more aid, but for these barriers to be removed.

The third demand is that debts of developing countries are cancelled. Some will balk at this. "Charity begins at home" is the usual argument, but we can afford to give. Our poorest are better off than the one in five of the world's population who live on less than 65p a day and, even if some of our debt relief and aid money goes astray, surely it matters more that some of our wealth trickles into desperate hands?