ISRAEL IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: READING MASHAV EXPERIENCE

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SAHRA-ALTI AFRİKA'DA İSRAİL: MASHAV TECRÜBESİNİ OKUMAK

Öz

Dış yardımlar, kuşkusuz, modern diplomasinin önemli bir aracıdır. Bu enstrümanı profesyonel anlamda kullanan ülkelerden biri olan İsrail'in Sahra-altı Afrika'ya açılımı bu makalenin inceleme konusudur. Arap ülkeleri arasında kendini güvende hissetmeyen İsrail'in 1960'lı yıllar itibarıyla uygulamaya koyduğu açılım politikası, dış yardım politikaları açısından da dikkat çekici bir girişimdir. Bu girişimin değerlendirilmesinde MASHAV faktörü ve İsrail karar-alıcılarının tutumu esas alınmıştır. Bulgular, İsrail'in bölgedeki yalnızlığını kırmasında Sahra-altı ülkeleriyle geliştirdiği yardım işbirliğinin belirleyici olduğunu ve ilişkilerde "altın dönem" yaşandığını ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Diplomasi, Dış yardım, İsrail, MASHAV, Sahra-altı Afrika

Abstract

Foreign aid is, no doubt that, a crucial instrument of modern diplomacy. This article scrutinizes Israeli opening to Sub-Saharan Africa where the country professionally used the aid card. As of 1960s, the initiative put into practice by Israel which is surrounded by Arab countries, became noteworthy in terms of foreign aid policy. This study is based on MASHAV factor and the stance of Israeli decision-maker. The findings indicate that Israel's aid cooperation with Sub-sahara has been determinant in breaking its isolation at the region and the bilateral relations were carried out in a so-called "golden age".

Keywords: Diplomacy, Foreign Aid, Israel, MASHAV, Sub-saharan Africa

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1. Introduction

Having a long historical background, foreign aid activities are almost seen as a way to carry out country policies abroad. By conveying every kind of assistance to the needy areas in the world, the developed countries put an appearance where not only education, employment and health conditions are weak; but also policy-making, institutional capacity and state craft as a whole. Colonization-torn Africa undoubtedly became a floor for foreign aid policies of mainly OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries. However new-born Israel's engagement with African countries is quite meaningful, at least, in terms of breaking its loneliness at diplomatic realms. As the classical approach of Israeli security policy is based on the perception that it is geographically surrounded by the enemies, this opening was really a way out.

When Israel announced an opening to Sub-Saharan Africa; the continent had not witnessed many professional aid programs yet. Started more than fifty years ago, Israel's initiative features important lessons that might suggest some valuable insights for today's country policies towards the region. If to consider a number of non-DAC (Development Assistance Committee) actors such as China and India have returned to the continent as emerging donors (Kragelund, 2008:555) as of 2000s, this opening can be perceived better. Even Turkey, whose historical, cultural and religious ties with the continent goes centuries back, declared its opening policy to Africa only in 2005. There is little doubt that such a diverse and competitive setting like Africa makes the need for informed decisions on development cooperation more crucial. Furthermore, Israel's Africa experience is a rich repertoire for the academic debate of development cooperation and foreign policy as it was rarely free of political ups and downs. It is therefore our interest to have a closer look at Israel's experience in Sub-Saharan Africa, with a certain focus on its international development cooperation agency known as MASHAV.

2. Israel's Entry into Sub-Saharan Africa, Reasons, and Dynamics
2.1. Isolation from the Third World

Israel is among the first countries to recognize the newly independent Sub-Saharan countries in 1960s (Oded, 2010:121). Furthermore, Israel is one of the first aid providers in Sub-Saharan Africa (Oded, 2009:1). Israel's orientation toward the region can be considered as a move in

what can be named the "Third World" War between Israel and its Arab adversaries. Young post-colonial nations of the Third World constituted an important international audience and a large number of UN votes to be gained both for the Jewish state and the Arab bloc given the search of each for diplomatic leverage against the other. This was particularly the case for Israel as it received only conditional American support against an Arab bloc that was strongly supported by the Soviets (Inbal and Zahavi, 2009:18). Sub-Saharan Africa, a geographic setting that was home to the largest number of post-colonial actors, can be considered as the most important chapter in Arab – Israeli diplomatic wars over the Third World.

A key development that alerted the leadership of the young State of Israel was its exclusion from the Afro-Asian Conference which took place in Bandung (Indonesia) in 1955. Though, even a brief look at the participation breakdown explains the diplomatic defeat. Of the twenty – nine participating countries, fourteen were Muslim and Arab. In addition to that, Syrian and Yemeni delegations included Palestinian leaders. Starting with Egypt's then president Abd al-Nasir's opening address; the entire conference reflected an anti-Israel atmosphere that resulted in a resolution in support of Palestinian position (Oded, 2010: 123). There is little doubt that this incident alerted Israeli decision-makers on the urgent need to complement military success with diplomatic breakthrough. The sentiment is powerfully reflected in Ben-Gurion's remarks:

> We must break out of the encirclement by a hostile Arab world and build bridges to the emerging nations on the black continent. We could not allow a situation similar to that of our relations with most Asian nations to develop. There we had been excluded from the Bandung Afro-Asian conference in 1955. Burma, at the pinnacle of her prestige was our friend. But almost every other nation on the continent we shared was not. We have more to offer to Africans than just diplomatic niceties – we were prepared to aid in their social and material development (quoted by Ehud Avriel in Oded, 2010:123).

Another manifestation of diplomatic isolation that even deepened Israel's concerns was the non-aligned supported pro-Arab UN resolution about the 1956 Sinai Campaign (Inbal and Zahavi, 2009:18). This diplomatic bottleneck of Israel met with decolonization at a historical crossroads. It was the right moment for Israel to be responsive to the new African nations' expectations in order to end its own isolation (Yacobi, 2010:442).

2.2. Africa Outreach

As of 1957, Israel had a total of seven embassies in the world, six of which were in European and North American capitals (Levey, 2001: 88).Israel's first diplomatic mission in Africa was opened in Ghana in 1957 (Oded, 2010: 122). Israel's first high level visit to the continent was Golda Meir's successful tour that included Liberia, Ghana, Nigeria, the Ivory Coast and Senegal (Levey, 2001:94). Throughout the 1960s, the "Golden Age" of Israeli – Sub-Saharan relations, Israel initiated diplomatic relations with 33 newly established Sub-Saharan countries. The only two countries that Israel was not able to gain recognition from were Mauritania and Somalia. Both were 100 % Muslim and joined the Arab League in 1974 (Oded, 2009:1). The response of Sub-Saharan dignitaries indicates a similar level of interest in cooperation with Israel. 10 presidents from the region visited Israel in between 1960 and 1963 (Oded, 2010:130). By 1966, most of the African leaders had made at least one visit to Israel (Chazan, 2009:19).

In the overall, Sub-Saharan Africa was Israel's most important diplomatic destination in the Third World (Oded, 2009:4). The "Golden Age" is a time during which Israel's best diplomats were appointed to the Department of International Cooperation (MASHAV) in order to design and implement Israel's development projects in Sub-Saharan Africa (Chazan, 2009:3). In early sixties, there was already substantial change in the geographic breakdown of Israel's diplomatic missions as almost half of its embassies around the world were located in the Sub-Saharan region. This made Israel the fourth largest diplomatic presence in the South of Sahara after the US, the UK and France (Oded, 2010:122).

The pace and volume of Israel's involvement in Africa indicates the will to prevent another Bandung. Israeli leaders were well aware of the urgent need to act faster than Arab countries to avoid any future diplomatic defeat, especially at the UN floor. In 1960, Israel's permanent representative at the UN Michael Comay had put this preemptive diplomatic vision very clearly when he said "In the next year or two, we must establish facts … technical assistance and commerce as a dam against diplomatic crises bund to come" (Levey, 2001: 106). It did not take too long for Israelis that they were right in their concerns. In 1961, Casablanca Conference adopted the "African Charter of Casablanca" which dedicated a whole chapter to resolutions on Palestine. The document took a highly critical stance towards Israel not only by making a call "to restore to the Arabs of Palestine all their legitimate rights" but

also criticizing Israel for its cooperation with the former colonizers of the continent. It noted,

> with indignation that Israel has always taken the side of Imperialists each time an important position had to be taken concerning vital problems about Africa, notably Algeria, the Congo and the nuclear tests in Africa. The Conference, therefore, denounces Israel as an instrument in the service of Imperialism and neo-colonialism, not only in the Middle East but also in Africa and Asia

The development cooperation figures of the following years show that Israel took the idea of building diplomatic dams against a possible flood of Arab pressure over these countries. By mid-1960s, Israel had already sent 1800 experts to all over Sub-Sahara to work in a variety of development projects and received few thousand African participants for training (Chazan, 2009:3).

2.3. Why Sub-Saharan Africa?

Besides its interest in breaking the Arab embargo and gaining support of the largest geographical bloc at the UN (Inbal and Zahavi, 2009: 18), Israel was also interested in *de-Islamizing* the Arab – Israeli conflict. One third of Africa's population is Muslim and a sizeable portion of that sum lives in the south of Sahara. Israel wanted to preempt the hostility of a possible Islam coalition by building links with Muslim majority Sub-Saharan countries (Oded, 2010:125). Furthermore, Israel wanted to secure strategic sea and air routes by having access to key port cities as well as use the air space of Ethiopia, Kenya and Tanzania. It is also important to note that Sub-Saharan Africa was an important component of Israel's Peripheral Containment strategy. Ben Gurion's "alliance of the periphery" envisioned containing the Arab world by establishing bilateral alliances with non-Arab actors around it, Ethiopia, Turkey and Iran being the major ones. The Africa leg of the strategy mainly focused on balancing Arab Africa with strong Sub-Sahara relations (Akçay and Anlı, 2013:160).

Economic interests have also played an important role as a pull factor. Africa was, as it is now, abundant with raw materials that matched the needs of Israeli companies. Israel's plan was to import these raw materials and sell industrial products to its African counterparts (Oded, 2010: 124). However, expectations of having a business breakthrough

with Africa were not realized. Israel's foreign trade with Africa did not reach to a volume that was hoped in early days of the outreach (Inbal and Zahavi, 2009).

Finally, the share of Israel's domestic political dynamics needs to be recognized as another driving force of outreach to Africa. In Ben-Gurion's government, Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs was subordinated to the Ministry of Defense. Golda Meir, soon after becoming the minister of foreign affairs, realized that she could by-pass this hierarchy and realize her full capacity in Africa, a domain that was hardly a priority for the security elite. Meir's focus on Africa was so strong that, unlike any other Israeli foreign minister, she was associated with a single continent (Levey, 2001:89). Her personal involvement is also attested by the special emphasis on Africa in her autobiography where she wrote "I am more proud of the international cooperation program and the assistance we gave to the nations of Africa than any other project we took on ourselves to carry out" (Oded, 2009: 3). Meir also played a central role in the establishment of Mt. Carmel International Training Center in Haifa named after her (Oded, 2010:125).

2.4. The Rhetoric of the Outreach: Zionism as Anti-Imperialism

Israel's Africa engagement had its own moving language that included strong ideological, emotional, and cultural elements (Oded, 2010:125). The minds behind Israel's diplomatic outreach to Africa, most importantly Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion and Foreign Minister Golda Meir, communicated this policy with this highly idealistic language (Levey, 2001:88). For example, the liberation emphasis of Zionism was frequently reiterated by Israeli leaders in order to stress a philosophical connection between Israel's founding ideology and decolonization. In fact, there was strong evidence to constitute such link, as it is stated in the words of Theodor Herzl in his book *Alteneuland:*

> There is another issue involving racial discrimination which still has to be solved. The depth of this problem which involves atrocities and sufferings can be well understood by the Jews. I mean the sufferings of the blacks. It is a very serious question. Think about the horror of the Slave Trade—Human beings are kidnapped and sold as slaves only because of the black color of their body. Their children are grown in a foreign environment, despised and humiliated only because of the black color of their

> face. I am not ashamed to promise this, let people laugh at me because of that. Now that I see the revival of the Jewish nation; I would like very much to take part and assist in the process of redemption and revival of the black people (Oded, 2010: 125).

This excerpt from Herzl's work was sent to Israeli embassies around the world from the Africa Desk in Tel Aviv. The quote was accompanied by a message from the Head of the Africa Desk that encouraged it being used in public relations activities related to Africa (Yacobi, 2010:447).Herzl was responded with equal excitement by some African intellectuals who welcomed the Jewish struggle for an independent homeland and named their own struggles as "Black Zionism". The influence of these intellectuals on the founders of Kenya, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Liberia and Madagascar is one of the reasons of these countries' friendly attitude towards Israel (Oded, 2009:3). Judaism also plays a role in building Israeli soft power through the biblical notion of Israel "being a light unto nations" or the kabbalistic concept of "repairing the world", *tikkun olam* (Beker, 2006: 35). Even references to a "messianic mission" were at play, as seen in this statement by Ben-Gurion:

> It is the messianic vision, which has lived for thousands of years in the heart of the Jewish people, the vision of national and universal salvation, and the aspiration to be a "covenant of the people" and a "light of the nations," that has preserved us to this day, and only through loyalty to our Jewish and universal mission will we safeguard our future in the homeland and our standing among the
>
> nations of the world (Fried, 2006: 51).

Though, the association of Zionism with anti-imperialism was not purely out of an Israeli admiration of Africa's struggle against colonial powers. Having been attacked in the Casablanca Charter for being "an instrument in the service of imperialism", Israel had to restrict its pride for Western credentials to Western circles and avoid siding with former colonizers especially on issues that were related to Africa (Oded, 2010: 124). To that end, at the end of each African presidential visit to Israel, a joint communiqué against colonialism and racial discrimination was signed (Ibid, 130).Ben-Gurion once wrote to the founder of the prime minister of Ghana "Though of the white race, Jews have suffered at the hands of the white peoples" (Levey, 2001: 88). A closer look at Israel's rhetoric reveals a variety of elements of cultural, religious, ideological affinity with Africa. The most visible of these was the image of a shared post-

colonial history and, based on it, the idea of human solidarity that would overwhelm any international agenda (Yacobi, 2010: 446).Another related aspect was framing the relationship as partnership of equals (Oxbridge Writers, 2013: 1). Ben-Gurion expressed Israel's moral geopolitics in a very straightforward fashion:

> We are standing on the threshold of a new era in human development... Nations that were subordinated for decades and hundreds of years to a foreign regime . . . dismantle the burden of these foreign regimes and stand independently. . . . At the same time the interdependency between those nations escalates (Yacobi, 2010: 444).

African leadership welcomed the message as indicated in the words of Modibo Keita, President of Mali:

> Israel is becoming an object of pilgrimage for African peoples who seek inspiration on how to build their own countries. Israel has become a human approach to building a new society of 20 million Africans (Ibid, 444).

Despite all the excitement, even the "Golden Age" was not free from problems. Israel did its best to keep the spirit of solidarity afloat which was disrupted by downturns such as the Casablanca Charter or absence of significant Israeli opposition against French nuclear tests and the apartheid in South Africa (Levey, 2001: 105).

3. MASHAV Experience in Sub-Saharan Africa

The second pillar of Israel's Africa outreach, after diplomacy, was technical cooperation (Chazan, 2006: 3). The task was undertaken by Israel's Center for International Cooperation (MASHAV) which was founded in 1958 within the Foreign Ministry and has been a part of Israel's diplomatic establishment since then. As it is mostly preferred by the developed countries, this clear tie between the aid agency and the ministry of foreign affairs clearly indicates that foreign assistance is used as an instrument for foreign policy. MASHAV has provided training for 270.000 participants (MASHAV, 2011:4) from 140 countries (Oded, 2009:1) as of 2011, according to the sources. These considerable numbers were of course resulted from some pros of MASHAV.

3.1. MASHAV's Advantages

MASHAV's work as a cooperation agency in Africa featured a rare south – south nature. Unlike the attitudes towards Western powers, Israel's activities did not become a concern for the host African countries (Ibid: 1). Furthermore, Israel's impressive expertise as a country of immigrants in rural development, community building, cooperatives and micro-business (Divon, 2006: 22) perfectly matched with the urgent needs of young African nations. Israeli expertise was so much sought for that Israel was able to follow a "burden sharing" policy according to which its experts in Africa would be paid by the beneficiary countries and African trainees in Israel were supposed to cover their travel expenses (Inbal and Zahvi, 2009:34)

As Israel itself was a developing country or, "a living laboratory of development" (Inbal and Zahavi, 2009:56), during the Africa outreach, its experience was more relevant and useful than that of any other donor in Africa (Levin, 1972: 43).As observed in a research:

> For many developing countries, Israel's in-between status represents the 'next step' on the development ladder – far ahead of their present status but not so far as to appear beyond reach. This, no doubt, is one of the reasons for the symbolic significance that Israel seems to have attained in the emerging world (Inbal and Zahavi, 2009: 27).

In a similar vein, Secretary General of Ghana Trades Union noted, "Israel has given me more in eight days than I could obtain from two years in a British University" (Yacobi, 2010:442). Moreover, Israel's projects had a strong field oriented character rather than being advisory support in government headquarters (Inbal and Zahavi, 2009:30).

Israel was also a very swift and responsive donor. Typically, dispatching of an expert by a developed country was a matter of months whereas Israel could respond to such demands sometimes even within days (Ibid, 33). This flexibility was achieved thanks to the bridging mission of MASHAV rather than being a direct undertaker. MASHAV has partnerships with state agencies and NGOs with expertise in development and links them to their counterparts in beneficiary countries (Ibid, 35). Another factor that made Israeli aid attractive was its "no strings" policy (Levin, 1972: 40).Although the underlying political motives were not hidden, Israeli aid was not conditioned to international political support (Inbal and Zahavi, 2009: 19). The unconditional nature of Israeli aid even enabled the Jewish state to undertake programs in India, Pakistan,

Somalia, Mauritania and Indonesia; none of which had diplomatic relations with it (Ibid, 19).

Israel's Africa outreach in general and MASHAV in particular enjoyed a good deal of support at home as well. Both the government and the opposition parties in Israel would support the idea of development assistance to Africa (Yacobi, 2010: 449). The program also had a large popular support bases (Inbal and Zahavi, 2009: 9) which can be attributed to the discourse of Zionist idealism described earlier. Therefore, it is of little surprise that until early 70s MASHAV was the largest department in the Foreign Ministry and Israel had the largest per capita technical assistance in the Western bloc (Ibid, 9). In the same period, Israel's per capita spending for development aid was 50 % higher than the OECD average (Fried, 2006: 44). Finally, the outreach program meant employment for Israel's significant surplus labor of doctors, engineers and agricultural experts (Inbar and Zahavi, 2009: 24).

3.2. The Rupture or Africa's "betrayal"

The 1967 Six Day War was the first major blow to Israel's Africa outreach and is remembered as the end of the honeymoon (Chazan, 2006: 3). The war also resulted in *Islamization* and *Africanization* of the Arab – Israeli conflict. This is not surprising as 9 out of 22 Arab League countries are in Africa and 22 members of OIC (Organization for Islamic Cooperation) are Sub-Saharan countries (Oded, 2010: 133). In other words, Arab diplomacy was successful in bringing other Muslim majority countries as well as non-Muslim African countries on board through these two bodies. Having seized Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, Israel was now an invader in Africa that had to be "chased out" (Ibid, 133). The continent-wide agreement of African governments to act harmoniously in multilateral forums is another reason of the almost unified African response to Israel (Ibid, 134). Soon after the war, came an Arab diplomatic charge against Israel in the form of multilateral resolutions beginning with the Algiers meeting of OAU in 1968 (Arthur and Gyimah-Boadi, 2006: 28). That resolution was followed by an Afro-Asian UNGA resolution in 1971 and another at the Rabat meeting of OAU in 1972 (Oded, 2010: 134).

The repercussions of the 1973 Yom Kipur War were even worse for Israel's relations with Sub-Saharan Africa. Within a time as short as 40 days, 24 Sub-Saharan countries severed diplomatic relations with Israel (Oxbridge Writers, 2013: 2).The rupture led to a substantial change in the way Israel's public opinion and leadership saw Africa. Abandonment of

Israel was considered to be a betrayal and led to a dramatic cut in Israel's development aid programs and budget. Undoubtedly, the biggest defeat during the isolation period followed by the war was the UN resolution against Zionism in 1975. By 1980, Israel had diplomatic ties with only four Sub-Saharan African states.

The resulting picture left those who still argued for continuing the outreach largely ignored (Chazan, 2006:5). The response to the African "betrayal" was a permanent shrinking of domestic public and political support for Israeli aid programs (Inbal and Zahavi, 2009: 13). It is important to note however that throughout the following two decades, the sharp decrease in the aid budget was mostly compensated by third party donor support which provided as high as 90 % of MASHAV budget by mid-1980s (Ibid, 14). Among the donors were the beneficiary countries, bilateral organizations and multilateral ones such as OAS and OECD (Ibid, 34).

3.3. MASHAV During the Isolation Years

Israel sought to maintain its existing ties across Sub-Saharan Africa rather than cutting off the entire relationship. In the absence of any diplomatic relations with most of the countries, the task was carried out by MASHAV. For example, MASHAV was the only link between Israel and Kenya during the isolation period. Similarly, although Ghana was one of the countries boycotting Israel, Israeli experts continued their work in this country (Boadi, 2006: 29). Furthermore, despite the diplomatic boycott, Israel was still able to train hundreds of African students at Mt. Carmel Institute. In some countries, Israel also had "interest officers" working under the auspices of other embassies (Oded, 2010: 136).

Israel made a huge foreign aid investment in Africa by sending 70 % of its development experts between 1958 and 1973 to this continent (Inbal and Zahavi, 2009: 18). Israel's ability to maintain a basis in Africa proves that this investment was by no means futile. Remembering what the head Israel's UN mission said in 1960, it may well be argued that MASHAV did act as a dam against the diplomatic boycott by reducing, although not totally preventing, its negative effect on Israel's interests in Africa. In the overall, MASHAV's work in Africa during the boycott years made Israel's return to the continent in 1990s an easier task (Oded, 2009: 7).

4. Change in Perspectives

By early 1990s, a number of domestic, regional and international developments had already led to an enabling international atmosphere for Israel's return to Africa. One of them was the groundbreaking success of peace efforts in the Middle East (Levey, 2001: 108). It can be argued that progress in Israeli – Palestinian talks and Israel's peace treaty with Jordan provided Israel the regional legitimacy to reach out once again to Sub-Saharan Africa. The fact that the first restoration took place in 1982 with Zaire after Israel began returning Sinai to Egypt (Boadi, 2006: 28) attests to this argument. Another key development was the collapse of the Soviet Union (Oded, 2010: 137). The Soviets saw Africa as an important front against the US and did not welcome the idea of Israeli presence in the continent which they believed would serve American interests.

The end of apartheid regime in South Africa (Levey, 2001:108) also saved Israel from a moral burden and loss of prestige in the eyes of African public opinion. Furthermore, there was a certain level of disappointment with mostly unfulfilled Arab aid commitments in Africa. African leaders also found it disturbing to see Muslim recipients being favored by Arab donors (Oded, 2010:137). By late 1990s, the number of African countries having diplomatic relations with Israel had reached 40 (Boadi, 2006: 10). It should be noted however that Israel's return to Africa could not lead to another "Golden Age" in relations. Unlike the idealism 1960s, Israel's new generation of leaders was rather pragmatic, expecting direct and quick political rewards for aid. In order to support that agenda, MASHAV's focus turned to Arab Africa. Although there was a certain level of growth in MASHAV's budget in early 1990s, the importance attached by Israeli leadership to development aid faded as the peace process stalled towards the end of that decade (Inbal and Zahavi, 2009: 48).

Their brief but problematic history between Arabs and Israelis has also taught some lessons to African countries. The current African political behavior can be named a "balancing policy" that envisions good relations with and aid from both sides. A key characteristic of this policy is a tendency to maintain good *bilateral* relations with Israel while supporting the Arab position in *multilateral* forums (Oded, 2010: 139).

As of today, Israel's aid policy is a selective one shaped by less idealism and more pragmatism (Oded, 2010:138). Moreover, unlike the 1960s trend of having an embassy in every African capital, Israel currently has only nine embassies in countries that are of primary economic or strategic

importance (Ibid, 138). Accordingly, MASHAV's budget mainly depends on the prospect of political dividends (Inbal and Zahavi, 2009: 10). MASHAV projects have also become selective based on economic and political gains (Oded, 2010: 138). The main themes of MASHAV programs in Africa are food security, medicine and public health, community building and development, advancement of women and education (Divon, 2006: 19-24).

Israeli public opinion on aid programs in general does not remind the widespread popular support in 1960s. The public sentiment reflects directly on politics. Despite three attempts in recent years, it was not possible to bring a proposal for an international aid bill to Knesset because there were not enough votes to open it to discussion (Inbal and Zahavi, 2009:52). This lack of public and political excitement on providing foreign aid explains the extremely humble budget of MASHAV compared to the earlier decades. While MASHAV received 34 % of the Foreign Ministry's budget in 1960, today this share is 3 % (Fried, 2006: 46). As far as the GDP share is concerned, Israel's aid allocation has shrunk from 4 % of the GDP in 1963 (Inbal, 2009: 47) to 0.068 % in 2007 (Inbal and Zahavi, 2009:10). This is the smallest percentage in the developed world and one fifth of the OECD donor countries' average (Inbal, 2009:47).

The arguments against a large aid budget are highly familiar ones to the researchers on development aid. Foreign aid has not been a main issue for any Israeli government since 1973 on grounds that there is more need for money at home (Inbal and Zahavi, 2009:42). The other main point raised by opponents of a large aid program is Israel's extraordinarily large percentage of defense expenditure (Inbal, 2009:47). In any case, the aforementioned numbers are the indicators of both dramatic decrease in aid budget and Israeli philanthropy which is accordingly reformulated in a more pragmatist way.

5. Discussion: Conditionality vs. Altruism

Despite its virtuous nature, the concept of foreign aid has been seriously criticized for being donor-centric in terms of its goals and prioritizing donor interests over everything else (Akçay, 2012: 32). Moreover, it has typically been challenging for donor countries to satisfy the needs of the recipients and advance their own agendas. Israel is not an exception. The debate in Israel on how to balance political expectations and moral aspect in aid policy is almost as old as the country's development assistance

program itself. The issue became a political dilemma especially during the official deliberations that followed anti-Israeli OAU and UN resolutions that were supported mostly by aid recipients of Israel. Israel's development program was intended to combine strategic interests with ideological moral motivations (Divon, 2006: 16).For the first generation leaders, Israel's aid agenda accommodated idealism and realism and even favored the former in rhetoric. The quote below from Meir expresses that attitude very clearly:

> Did we go into Africa because we wanted votes at the United Nations? Yes, of course that was one of our motives—and a perfectly honourable one—which I never, at any time, concealed either from myself or from the Africans. But it was far from being the most important motive, though it certainly wasn't trivial. The main reason for our African "adventure" was that we had something we wanted to pass on to nations that were even younger and less experienced than ourselves (Oded, 2010: 126).

Though, what Meir voiced was by no means a consensus. A more pragmatic and managerial group of Israeli elite (Levey, 2001: 101) held a different view and were critical of Meir's romanticized language. According to them it was in the best interest of both Israel and its African counterparts to clarify mutual expectations. They believed that Israel was supposed to make its realistic goals well understood instead of portraying a "messianic dream" (Levey, 2001: 102-103). A powerful example to the tension between the two views is the criticism of Israeli daily *Haaretz* towards Meir because of her proud remarks about Israel's diplomatic success in Africa. The newspaper's reaction came shortly after Meir's comment that the Israeli embassy was the most influential in Ghana and "had become part of the country itself" (Levey, 2001: 102). *Haaretz* challenged the Foreign Minister by asking a very simple question: How would Israelis feel if the US Secretary of State, after a visit to Israel, says the United States has the greatest influence in Israel and its embassy is already part of the country? (Ibid, 102).

MASHAV was central in the debate, defended by the advocates of the moral approach for gaining Israel considerable prestige on one hand and being criticized for failing to prevent loss of diplomatic ground in Africa. The answer is somewhere in between and has been well worded in a survey by Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

> although Israel does not link cooperation with MASHAV to political achievements and does not expect anything in return, in

actual fact MASHAV's activities serve as an important tool for the Israeli embassies in their bilateral relations. MASHAV's activities contribute to promoting Israel's image as a country with something to give and that there is a desire to receive aid from it (Oded, 2009: 14).

As a consequence, Israel's opening adventure to Africa comprises noteworthy points with respect to foreign aid policies especially to Africa. The first striking facet of this opening policy was pertaining to its rhetoric. While messianic mission and/or Kabbalistic notions motivated Israeli policy-makers and diplomats on one hand; the discourses on black Zionism, colonialism, racial discrimination and burden sharing won the hearts of African leaders, on the other.

To strengthen the rhetorical base, Israel took tangible steps like signing joint communiques with African leaders to blame the humanity crimes performed by the "white" ones. In another saying, it was not only on words but also in official documents. A more concrete indicator was to open up new diplomatic missions and appoint skillful diplomats for aid works instead of seeing it as a secondary diplomatic service. This was most probably why the 1960s were called as Golden Age in (aid) policy towards the Sub-Sahara.

It is well-known that sending foreign aid is criticized by the local communities and the opposition parties of the donor countries. For instance, the opponents argue it is not fair while the nation has its own poor citizens, voicing bit "nationalist" concerns. In Israeli case, the internal support was high at first but then it turned to be the issue of criticism when some undesired/unexpected happenings were identified as "betrayal".

Israel, at the beginning, used the aid card very successfully as a (positive) soft diplomacy power. However, after facing with so-called betrayal, Israel gave up its generous approach and reacted with cutting aid as a (negative) power. This dramatic change most probably caused to losing long-term benefits of Golden Age altruism.

Aid policy, in fact, should be consistent and balanced. This can be succeeded via long-running realistic approach rather than passing enthusiasm. As a nature, making foreign assistance needs idealism, but when it comes to protecting national interests donor countries look for more pragmatist methodologies in aid cooperation. This is where Israel is now, while Africa waits for new alternative openings.

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