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Aid Restructuring and Imperial Decline: British Aid Policy towards East Africa under the Colonial Development and Welfare Act 1959

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Abstract

The Colonial Development and Welfare Act 1959 was a major economic instrument through which Britain sought to preserve its imperial influence amid the accelerating tide of decolonization. After the Second World War, declining national strength and a rapidly changing international order made Britain's entrenched aid policy in East Africa increasingly unsustainable. In response, the British Government reassessed the strategic value of its colonies, revised the existing aid framework, and, after prolonged parliamentary debate, amended the Colonial Development and Welfare Act in 1959. The new legislation marked a shift from a rigid colonial aid model to a more flexible one, designed to sustain British influence within the emerging Commonwealth framework. By expanding loans, strengthening educational and technical assistance, and encouraging private capital and external aid, the Act partly eased Britain's fiscal burden while preserving channels of influence in East Africa. Yet this strategy soon encountered serious constraints. As decolonization accelerated, Britain's financial capacity continued to weaken, while newly independent East African states increasingly demanded greater political and economic autonomy. The contradictions between imperial ambition and declining national capacity therefore became increasingly apparent. Ultimately, Britain's attempt to substitute economic assistance for direct colonial rule and to maintain imperial authority through a more flexible aid regime failed to arrest the broader decline of empire.

Keywords

British Empire, East Africa, Aid Policy, Colonial Development and Welfare Act

1. Introduction

From the late nineteenth century, East Africa's abundant natural resources and strategic position in the Indian Ocean region made it a major focus of British colonial expansion. Kenya, Uganda, and Tanganyika were incorporated into the imperial system at different times and under different administrative arrangements. Uganda became a British protectorate in 1894, while the East Africa Protectorate, established the following year, was the precursor to colonial Kenya. Formerly part of German East Africa, Tanganyika came under British administration after the First World War, with Britain's mandate formally confirmed by the League of Nations in 1922. Together, these distinct paths of expansion and forms of administration shaped the structure

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of British imperial rule in East Africa. Following the passage of the Colonial Development Act 1929, the British Government began providing financial aid for colonial development, with East Africa among the principal beneficiaries. Although successive amendments were made to the Colonial Development and Welfare Acts after the Second World War, British aid remained primarily geared towards resource exploitation and the maintenance of colonial rule. During the 1950s, however, Britain's mounting economic difficulties, growing American and Soviet involvement in Africa, the rise of East African nationalism, and the Suez Crisis combined to deepen the crisis of British colonial rule in East Africa. This, in turn, eroded the fiscal and political foundations of the existing aid model, making it increasingly difficult to sustain. Confronted with these pressures, the Macmillan Government undertook a series of reviews of Britain's imperial position, reassessed the strategic value of East Africa, and sought ways of preserving British influence at a lower political and financial cost.

Following the 1958 Commonwealth Trade and Economic Conference and sustained parliamentary debates over colonial development policy, the British Government ultimately revised its aid framework through the Colonial Development and Welfare Act 1959, expanding the role of loans, educational and technical assistance, and multilateral cooperation. British aid to East Africa thus began to shift from direct expenditure designed primarily to sustain colonial rule towards a model of development assistance intended to preserve institutional ties after independence. The significance of the 1959 Act therefore extended well beyond the immediate trajectory of British-East African relations: its implementation and consequences also provide an important vantage point from which to examine the wider decline and transformation of the British Empire.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the accelerating dissolution of the global colonial system intensified the crisis of empire, bringing the question of imperial survival to the forefront of scholarly attention. As the principal framework for official British colonial assistance, the Colonial Development and Welfare Acts have increasingly attracted the attention of Western scholars, who have examined, largely from a macro-level perspective, the causes and consequences of Britain's postwar adjustments to imperial aid policy. First, scholars represented by British historians Gordon Cumming and Michael Crowder have explored the factors that prompted Britain to readjust its aid policy after the war. Their interpretations can broadly be grouped into three approaches: the Cold War geopolitical explanation [1], the postwar economic imperatives explanation [2], and the imperial transformation and continuity interpretation [3]. Second, three broad schools of thought can be identified in Western scholarship on the impact of Britain's postwar imperial aid policy: positive [4], critical [5], and more synthetic assessments [6]. In Chinese scholarship, Cong Hang, in a systematic study of Britain's postwar policy towards sub-Saharan Africa, traces the evolution of the Colonial Development and Welfare Acts and provides a broad overview of the trajectory of British imperial aid policy at the macro level [7]. Ying Xue and Xiying Li, among others, have examined Britain's aid policy towards Africa from the respective perspectives of conflict prevention and strategic adjustment [8]. Although scholarship both within and outside China has produced a substantial body of research on imperial aid policy, existing studies have at times been shaped by differing national perspectives, intellectual frameworks, and historical sensibilities, making it difficult to arrive at a fully detached assessment of the issue. Moreover, much of the current literature approaches British imperial aid policy as a broad process extending across nearly three decades after the Second World War. As a result, insufficient attention has been paid to the specific relationship between Britain's adjustment of its aid policy towards East Africa under the Colonial Development and Welfare Act 1959 and the wider process of imperial decline.

In today's world, amid the deepening of China-Africa economic and trade cooperation, the rapid expansion of infrastructure development across Africa, and intensifying competition in the field of global development assistance, the question of how aid can be more effectively employed to foster friendly international relations has become an increasingly important concern in foreign policy. As part of Britain's most enduring framework of official colonial assistance, the Colonial Development and Welfare Act 1959 served as an important instrument for reshaping Britain's relations with East Africa. Against this background, drawing on extensively declassified British parliamentary papers and Cabinet records, this article examines the transformation of British aid policy towards East Africa under the 1959 Act through three interconnected dimensions—challenge, reconstruction, and predicament. It seeks to trace the historical logic linking the reorientation of aid policy to the changing fortunes of the British Empire, and to reveal how Britain attempted to reshape its relations with East Africa through revisions to the Act. In doing so, the article aims to provide a historical point of reference for understanding contemporary issues in international development assistance.

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2. Body of Paper

2.1 Severe Challenges to British Aid in East Africa in the 1950s

In the aftermath of the profound disruption caused by the Second World War, Britain experienced a relative decline in its economic strength. Although the country achieved a relatively stable social transition during the 1950s, fiscal tensions between the construction of the welfare state and the costs of maintaining the empire became increasingly acute, while Cold War rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union continued to intensify. At the same time, with the rise of African nationalism, Britain's East African colonies increasingly resisted forms of economic control exercised in the name of aid. As a result, Britain's imperial strategy in East Africa came under mounting pressure.

Since the early 1950s, the contradiction between the growing financial requirements of colonial development and Britain's limited capacity to provide the necessary funds had become increasingly apparent. Nevertheless, between 1951 and 1957, the Conservative Governments led by Winston Churchill and Anthony Eden continued to uphold the principle of strengthening the empire and largely maintained the Labour Government's policy of promoting the development of the East African colonies in the interests of both the British domestic economy and the wider imperial economy. Although the British Government claimed that its aid should constitute the principal source of external finance for the colonies, in practice the funds made available under the Colonial Development and Welfare Acts accounted for only a small proportion of local development expenditure. "About a half of the cost is being met from local resources, about a third from external loans, and about a sixth from C.D. and W. funds" [9]. Between 1946 and 1954, the British Government committed £16.744 million in aid funds to East Africa under the Acts, but only £12.985 million was actually disbursed [9]. More ironically, Britain's foreign-exchange controls compelled the East African colonies to surrender the dollars earned from their exports to the Sterling Area's common reserves, where their use was then restricted by London. In effect, this arrangement forced already impoverished colonies to finance Britain's external liabilities. As the British historian David Fieldhouse remarked critically, "between 1945 and 1951 Britain extracted some £140m" [10]. The British Treasury also expressed reservations about the development schemes introduced under the Colonial Development and Welfare Acts and voiced concern over the increasingly "overstretched" state of the British economy. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Richard Butler, urged the government to take account both of the scale of Britain's existing overseas commitments and of its capacity to meet them. As he observed, "Britain had taken on considerably swollen responsibilities in the fields of defence and welfare, yet with a narrower wealth base than before the war. Given the extent of Britain's economic difficulties, hard questions would have to be asked about the feasibility of maintaining current high levels of overseas expenditure" [11]. By 1952, the Treasury's reservations had become even more pronounced, "aid to the colonies, and funding to the Sterling Area generally, was diverting much-needed finance from the metropolitan economy, especially the export industries, and even that colonial development (far from assisting Britain's own economic position) was aggravating the country's difficult economic situation in the early 1950s" [11].

Beyond the growing domestic doubts about the economic value of empire, the material benefits of Britain's imperial economic system also declined markedly during the 1950s, weakening the degree of economic complementarity between Britain and East Africa. International prices for primary commodities fell steadily after 1953, sharply reducing the profitability of colonial resource development. At the same time, the share of British goods in East Africa's total imports declined from 81.6 per cent in 1953 to 58.9 per cent in 1959 [12]. The British Treasury grew increasingly sceptical about the sustainability of overseas assistance, arguing that "aid to the colonies and financial support for the Sterling Area were diverting urgently needed resources away from the domestic economy, particularly from the export industries; indeed, colonial development itself was exacerbating Britain's economic difficulties in the 1950s" [11]. The British official Martin Flett was even more forthright, remarking that "the whole conception of Commonwealth development as the solution to our difficulties is becoming something of a castle in the air" [13]. The divergence between the imperial economic system and Britain's domestic interests was becoming increasingly pronounced.

Against the geopolitical backdrop of the Cold War, the growing involvement of both the United States and the Soviet Union further undermined the viability of Britain's established colonial policy. The Cold War prompted both superpowers to reassess their foreign policies towards the Third World and to employ economic assistance as an important instrument in their global rivalry. On the one hand, sub-Saharan Africa, including

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East Africa, possessed abundant supplies of industrial raw materials, which had long attracted the strategic and economic interest of both Washington and Moscow; both powers therefore sought favourable opportunities to expand their presence in the region. On the other hand, each feared that East Africa might gravitate towards the opposing bloc, thereby weakening its own strategic position. Consequently, both the United States and the Soviet Union intensified their aid efforts in East Africa during the postwar period. American assistance to Africa through the Agency for International Development increased from US$100 million in 1950 to US$800 million in 1962. Of the approximately US$2 billion in official external economic assistance received by Africa annually, the United States accounted for roughly one quarter [14].

The Soviet Union saw Africa as an arena in which it could expand its influence and compete with the United States. With the establishment of the Baghdad Pact in 1955, the United States further consolidated its global strategic network, constructing a line of defence extending from Central Europe to the Far East and thereby tightening the strategic encirclement of the socialist bloc. Concerned about its national security, and confronted with the limited effectiveness of its counter-containment efforts in Eastern Europe and Asia, the Soviet Union increasingly shifted the focus of its diplomacy towards Africa. By championing anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism and supporting African independence movements, Moscow sought to expand its influence across the Third World. Although American assistance to Africa increased during this period, it did not extend to all of Britain's East African colonies. Africa continued to account for only a small proportion of total US foreign aid; in 1958, assistance to Africa represented merely 1.4 percent of overall American foreign aid, leaving greater scope for Soviet involvement. Although neither American nor Soviet assistance constituted the principal source of external aid to East Africa, the region nevertheless benefited from their growing engagement. Such assistance helped alleviate shortages of capital and technical expertise in local economic development and contributed to the continued functioning of the regional economy, thereby reducing, to some extent, the relative importance of British aid. For Britain, already constrained by mounting economic difficulties and limited financial resources for overseas assistance, this growing competition placed its position in East Africa under even greater pressure.

Meanwhile, political awakening within East Africa proceeded at a pace that exceeded British expectations, seriously undermining the colonial objectives that had underpinned Britain's aid policy. Around 1948, under the pressures of colonial land dispossession and racial discrimination, members of Kenya's Kikuyu community began to organize clandestinely in what later became known as the Mau Mau Movement. The uprising erupted on a large scale in 1952, with insurgents explicitly calling for an end to colonial rule and for self-government in Kenya [15], while launching armed attacks on white-owned farms and the colonial administration. Britain rapidly deployed troops to suppress the uprising and spent £160 million (approximately US$400 million) in bringing it under control, a figure that excluded the costs of deploying metropolitan forces, aircraft, and other military facilities [16]. At least one quarter of adult Kikuyu men were imprisoned or detained by the British colonial authorities [17]. This not only placed further strain on an already overburdened British economy, but also provoked international condemnation. In 1953, on the anniversary of the 1919 Amritsar Massacre, Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru publicly expressed support for Kenya's anti-colonial movement and mounted a forceful moral critique of British colonial violence. Although the Mau Mau uprising was ultimately suppressed by force, it fundamentally destabilised the foundations of British colonial rule in Kenya. Consequently, the British Colonial Secretary, Oliver Lyttelton, introduced constitutional reforms in Kenya in 1954, providing for the establishment of a multiracial Council of Ministers. The number of African ministerial representatives increased from four in 1954 to fourteen in 1957 [18], thereby strengthening the political voice of the indigenous population in the governance of the colony.

At almost the same time, the movements towards independence in Tanganyika and Uganda also gathered momentum. On 7 July 1954, Julius Nyerere, who had returned from his studies in Britain, became president of the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU) and committed himself to advancing the territory's decolonization. He called for the country to be "prepared for self-government", "rejection of tribalism and the achievement of a united nationalism; establishment of a democratic form of government; establishment of African majorities on all bodies of government; removal of all forms of racialism; and encouragement of and co-operation with trade unions, the co-operative movement and other sympathetic groups such as tribal unions" [19]. These demands signalled Tanganyika's determination to bring British colonial rule to an end. In Uganda, meanwhile, the appointment of Sir Andrew Cohen as Governor transformed the colonial administration into what was described as the most aggressive and active force for change with the creation of a strong and unified

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Uganda as its central objective. Under his administration, the number of African representatives on the Legislative Council increased from eight to fourteen on 11 August 1953 [20]. Subsequently, on 23 February 1954, Oliver Lyttelton, the British Secretary of State for the Colonies, declared that "when self-government is achieved in Uganda, Africans will be in charge of its affairs" [20]. This statement publicly acknowledged the prospect of eventual African self-government and marked a significant decline in Britain's influence in the region.

The Suez Crisis of 1956 further weakened Britain's capacity to sustain its imperial strategy in East Africa and made the postwar model of aid increasingly difficult to maintain. On 26 July 1956, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser announced the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company. The Eden Government subsequently coordinated military action with France and Israel despite American opposition, only to be forced into withdrawal under intense US economic pressure and diplomatic isolation. The crisis first compounded Britain's already fragile fiscal position and balance-of-payments difficulties. It was estimated that maintaining British forces in the Suez Canal Zone cost nearly £50 million. In November 1956 alone, Britain's gold and dollar reserves fell by approximately US$300 million [21]. At the same time, the closure of the canal and the disruption of oil pipelines dealt a further blow to British industrial production, which remained heavily dependent on Middle Eastern oil supplies.

Compared with its economic losses, the Suez Crisis inflicted an even more profound blow on Britain's international standing. The United States, long regarded as Britain's principal ally at the heart of the Anglo-American "special relationship," became less tolerant of empire in the aftermath of the Suez episode and was increasingly unwilling to support Britain in anti-colonial debates at the United Nations [22]. Washington refused to endorse Britain's military intervention and instead openly condemned it. As Denis Healey later observed, "The Suez debacle was a turning point in postwar history. It signified the end of Britain's imperial role outside Europe" [23]. The political repercussions of the crisis were soon felt in East Africa. Egypt's success strengthened anti-colonial sentiment across Africa, while Nasser emerged as an important symbol of anti-imperial resistance. The United States, meanwhile, took advantage of Britain's weakened position to press more actively for constitutional reform and decolonization in the colonies. At the same time, the British Government found it increasingly difficult to honour its existing aid commitments to East Africa while seeking to stabilise the balance of payments and secure American financial support. By this point, the early postwar vision of preserving the empire through expanded development in Africa had progressively lost its practical foundation under the combined pressures of declining fiscal capacity, mounting international constraints, and the rise of African nationalism.

By this stage, the combined pressures of economic decline, Cold War rivalry, rising East African nationalism, and the Suez Crisis had deepened the crisis of British colonial rule in East Africa, making the British Governments' postwar strategy of preserving colonial interests through aid increasingly difficult to sustain. Against this backdrop, Harold Macmillan became Prime Minister in 1957 and began to reassess Britain's imperial strategy, setting in motion a restructuring of British aid policy towards East Africa.

2.2 The Restructuring of British Aid Policy towards East Africa and the Enactment of the 1959 Act

The deepening crisis of British colonial rule in East Africa made the existing aid policy increasingly difficult to sustain, prompting the Macmillan Government to undertake a systematic restructuring in three successive and interconnected stages. The process began in 1957 with a reassessment of the strategic value of Britain's East African territories. Subsequent imperial reviews and the 1958 Montreal Conference helped shape a new approach to aid, which took legislative form in the Colonial Development and Welfare Act 1959 through parliamentary debate and negotiation. This policy adjustment reflected the tension between Britain's determination to preserve its imperial position and the growing pressure to adapt to decolonization, while signalling a shift in the rationale for British aid from supporting colonial development towards maintaining influence after independence.

After becoming Prime Minister in 1957, Harold Macmillan came to recognize that nationalism had become an irreversible historical tide. In a letter to the British Ambassador in Paris, he wrote: "The tide of the world is set in the direction of national...autonomy and identity... Time is not on the side of France, and she will not be able to swim against the tide of nationalism in North Africa any more than we have been able to do elsewhere

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in the world" [24]. To this end, Macmillan began to consider how Britain might adjust its aid policy so as to preserve imperial influence amid the irreversible tide of decolonization. It was in this context that the study outline entitled "Future Constitutional Development in the Colonies" emerged, seeking to reassess the value of the colonies. The outline evaluated the benefits Britain derived from its involvement in East Africa from four perspectives: political, strategic, economic, and developmental potential. In May of the same year, the Colonial Office submitted its report to Macmillan, arguing that Britain should not withdraw from East Africa.

First, in strategic terms, East Africa lay to the south of the Middle Eastern air defence zone and faced both the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean, giving the region considerable strategic importance. This significance increased further after Britain's position in the Middle East weakened, particularly in relation to Commonwealth defence. Second, from an economic perspective, East Africa's supply of primary commodities corresponded closely to British needs, while the region's economic growth also suggested that aid could generate substantial material returns for Britain. On the one hand, East Africa was Britain's sole source of sisal, and no suitable alternative supplier existed within the Sterling Area. Any interruption of East African supplies resulting from the withdrawal of aid would therefore have had serious consequences for Britain's access to this commodity. On the other hand, Kenya's economic growth encouraged British policymakers to view continued assistance not simply as an additional fiscal burden, but also as a potential source of tangible economic returns. Between 1952 and 1956, Kenya attracted £8 million in new investment in manufacturing alone, excluding profits generated through reinvestment. According to the report of the Royal Commission, beneficial investment on government account alone was estimated at £250 million over the following five years [25]. The Colonial Office therefore concluded that, if funds permitted, aid to East Africa should be maintained to secure substantial economic benefits for Britain and sustain the imperial system. Third, at the political level, continued aid to East Africa was considered conducive to preserving British authority in the region and safeguarding its political interests. Faced with increasingly acute multiracial tensions, rising nationalist sentiment, and growing demands for self-government, Britain increasingly relied on aid as a means of maintaining its regional influence. By presenting itself as an "arbiter" in East African affairs, it sought to mitigate ethnic conflict and anti-British sentiment and to prevent further deterioration of the local situation. Finally, any suspension of British assistance to East Africa risked being interpreted as a sign of declining British influence in the region. Should the Soviet Union or other hostile powers seize the opportunity to expand their presence in East Africa, Britain's established trading relationships there would also face greater obstacles. After weighing these considerations, the Colonial Office concluded that the consequences of terminating aid for Britain's international prestige and imperial interests would be more far-reaching than the pressures generated by anti-colonial opinion.

Yet the report failed to command unanimous support within the British Government, and many officials reacted to it with scepticism and unease. Norman Brook, chairman of the Cabinet Committee on Colonial Policy, regarded the reassessment of the colonies as little more than a straightforward exercise in information gathering. Frank Lee of the Treasury and other officials were likewise doubtful about a memorandum that appeared to pay insufficient attention to the financial costs of colonial commitments, viewing it as more a catalogue of arguments for preserving the status quo than a genuine reconstruction of aid policy. Even Macmillan himself expressed a sense of frustration at the forces confronting Britain. In a speech delivered in July 1957, he described nationalism as a wave sweeping from Asia across the oceans towards the shores of Africa, "There is not a colony which is not thinking of its future destiny . . . Of all political forces, the new rise of nationalism is the most powerful, swift, and elemental. It can be stubborn too. It can be led: but it cannot be driven back" [26]. It is therefore evident that Britain's conception of empire was increasingly oscillating between an emotional attachment to imperial continuity and a more pragmatic calculation of material interests.

Caught between these competing imperatives, Macmillan initiated a more extensive reassessment of Britain's imperial position. In June 1958, senior officials in the Macmillan Government prepared an internal report, *The Position of the United Kingdom in World Affairs*, which reassessed Britain's global role and emphasised development and technical assistance as means of sustaining its overseas influence. Significantly, the report employed the term "Commonwealth" far more frequently than "Empire," arguing that "we have an economic interest in the continued stability and development of the Colonies; a political interest in their continuing evolution within the Commonwealth" [27]. With regard to the specific organisation of aid, the report introduced three key adjustments. First, future British assistance was no longer to be fixed in form, but was instead to acquire greater flexibility and responsiveness to urgent circumstances. As the report stated,

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Britain's overseas policy was designed to ensure "the tactical flexibility required to secure essential United Kingdom interests, especially against Communist threats—e.g., by small-scale but expeditious aid in time of crisis to countries which are of strategic or political importance to the United Kingdom" [27]. Second, loans were to become the principal form of financial assistance. The British Government intended to rely primarily on lending to finance colonial development; yet over the following years, the colonies were expected to require no less than £20 million annually in external borrowing, while the prospects of the market being able to supply funds on such a scale remained uncertain [27]. Third, significantly greater strategic importance was to be attached to educational and technical assistance, with the aim of ensuring that "as dependent territories passed from our administrative control, they retained the English tongue as their official language" [28].

By September 1958, with the convening of the Commonwealth Trade and Economic Conference, the direction of Britain's adjustment of its imperial aid policy became clearer. Although Kenya, Tanganyika, and Uganda had not yet formally joined the Commonwealth, they participated in the United Kingdom delegation in an advisory capacity. The conference endorsed the continuation of British assistance to East Africa, but envisaged that such aid would be delivered jointly by governments, international organisations, international banks, and private capital, thereby shifting the burden of assistance from unilateral British responsibility towards a more diversified and collaborative framework. Britain also proposed the establishment of a bank to provide development finance for Commonwealth countries. As the conference report stated, "We have considered whether the development of Commonwealth countries could be assisted by the setting up of a new institution such as a Commonwealth Development Bank" [29]. Although the proposal held a certain appeal, many participating countries remained cautious and questioned whether the new institution would be able to mobilize additional funds effectively.

In addition, the conference proposed the establishment of a Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan, thereby placing greater emphasis on educational and technical assistance. As the conference declared, "Already the countries of the Commonwealth have manifested a determination, expressed in various technical assistance programmes, to help one another in improving the skills needed for economic growth. But in addition to the provision of technical assistance, it is vitally important that there should be available to all our countries the widest range of educational facilities of all kinds" [30]. By this stage, the basic framework for the adjustment of Britain's aid policy towards East Africa had largely taken shape: financial assistance was to be combined with technical and educational aid, while external actors such as the United States and international banks were brought in to share the burden of assistance, even as Britain sought to retain a leading role within the emerging framework. This adjustment reflected Britain's attempt to reconcile the preservation of its leading role in the aid system with the need to enlist external support. On the one hand, constrained by declining fiscal capacity and the rising costs of imperial administration, Britain increasingly emphasized the shared responsibility of other countries for the economic development of underdeveloped regions, thereby seeking to ease its own aid burden in East Africa. On the other hand, Britain continued to aspire to a dominant position within the emerging aid framework, declaring that "as a family of free nations in all parts of the world we have a crucial part to play; we have a unique responsibility to help in fostering the progress of human society and in solving its problems" [29]. Yet this adjustment contained an inherent tension. By encouraging external actors to participate jointly in aid to East Africa, Britain was in effect recasting the limitations of its own aid capacity as part of a broader framework of international development cooperation, thereby partially mitigating the political appearance of its declining imperial influence. At the same time, however, this policy weakened Britain's ability to dominate the aid agenda and the allocation of resources, gradually eroding its central position within the East African aid system. Multilateral assistance was therefore both a pragmatic means of compensating for Britain's diminishing capacity to provide aid and, to some extent, a process that accelerated the erosion of its control over aid policy.

As the direction of aid policy reform became increasingly clear, Parliament engaged in intense debate between March and July 1959 over the specific provisions of the revised Colonial Development and Welfare Act. On the question of funding, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Alan Lennox-Boyd, was among the first to set out the government's position, arguing that the principal objective of the 1959 Act was to extend the period of operation and provide additional resources for existing aid programmes. As he stated, "£115 million will be available far spending in the five years from 1st April of this year, at an average rate of £23 million a year" [31]. Many MPs, however, questioned whether this increase in funding represented any substantive improvement in Britain's capacity to provide aid. Barbara Castle, MP for Blackburn, put the

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criticism bluntly, "Africa is on the move and that we were dealing with one of the aspects of a highly explosive situation. … Although we may say, 'Look what good boys we are. Year by year we have increased this amount,' what have we really done? … We tend to be very hypocritical and sanctimonious about it" [31]. Castle's criticism was both pointed and firmly grounded in fiscal realities. Between 1946 and 1955, the total assistance provided by Britain under the Colonial Development and Welfare Acts amounted to less than one-thousandth of its national income. Even if the loans raised on the London market, to which the Colonial Secretary referred during the debate, were included, the total would still have amounted to less than two-thousandths of Britain's national income. Under the proposed revision of aid allocations then before Parliament, projected British expenditure would amount to only 13 shillings per person per year, or approximately 4.5 pence per person per week [31]. This starkly exposed the limitations of British aid. Nevertheless, many MPs continued to insist that Britain should persevere and provide as much financial assistance as it could, in the expectation that such expenditure might yield returns five or ten years later.

Second, the establishment of the Treasury loan mechanism constituted one of the most consequential provisions of the 1959 Act. For the British Government, Treasury lending represented a new departure in aid policy: it could provide East Africa with a more reliable source of finance while at the same time reducing Britain's dependence on grants. To this end, the Treasury was authorised "to make loans from the Consolidated Fund up to a total of £100 million over five years … with an annual ceiling of £25 million on loans approved" [31]. The interest rate on these loans was to be 1.25 percentage points higher than that charged by the government on loans to certain public corporations. On this basis, The *Times* and other media outlets estimated that the British Government would extend loans to East Africa and other colonial territories at an interest rate of 5.75 per cent [32]. The proposal, however, encountered strong opposition from a number of MPs led by Barbara Castle. In her view, "This just does not make colonial administrative sense. We on this side of the House say that to meet the problem which is growing increasingly acute because of this worsening in the terms of trade in the Colonies there is only one way, and that is by grants adequate to close the gap or loans—if loans there must be—at specially cheap rates of interest" [31]. The Government, however, maintained that loans were not a form of relief but a necessary means of helping East African territories establish creditworthiness and adapt to market-based financing after independence. The House of Commons ultimately rejected the proposal to reduce the interest rate on Treasury loans by 146 votes to 108. This decision reflected a profound shift in the logic of British aid. Whereas traditional imperial assistance had been more closely associated with the responsibilities of the metropolitan power, the introduction of the Treasury loan mechanism indicated that Britain was beginning to redistribute its imperial financial burdens through more market-oriented means, transferring part of the costs of development and the associated financial risks to recipient territories. The mechanism thus reflected both the increasing flexibility of British aid policy and a clear movement towards the marketization of assistance amid the wider decline of empire.

Third, the debate over the sources of aid reflected a clear shift in Britain's assistance to East Africa from unilateral provision towards a more collaborative, multilateral approach. Compared with 1958, when Britain had remained cautious about American involvement, support within Parliament for drawing on external sources of assistance had grown markedly. Many MPs advocated actively seeking funds from the United States, West Germany, international banks, and other sources to support African development jointly. In the House of Lords, John Drummond, 8th Earl of Perth, drawing on his own visits to educational institutions in East Africa, praised the American contribution to the construction of schools and technical colleges and remarked that, where such assistance was concerned, "the more the better" [33]. However, in contrast to their generally favourable attitude towards American assistance, MPs were divided over the role of private investment. Some argued that "it is infinitely better to have profits ploughed back by people who know these territories and the difficulties of development than that the government should handle the matter through the Colonial Development Corporation or the Colonial Development and Welfare Fund organisation" [31]. Other MPs, however, emphasized that "private investment in the Colonies has mainly gone into plantations, mining and general commerce rather than industry, and it certainly does not go into the provision of basic public services, without which nothing else can be done" [31]. Ultimately, Parliament arrived at a compromise: private investment should serve only as a supplement to official aid and public finance, rather than a substitute for the government's responsibility for development. It is therefore evident that a broad consensus was gradually emerging in favour of external assistance, particularly aid from the United States. This marked a shift in Britain's aid policy towards East Africa from an inward-looking effort to preserve its existing position to a

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growing reliance on external support. At the same time, however, it also meant that Britain's dominant position within the aid system would increasingly be exposed to pressure and challenge from outside powers.

Fourth, members of the House of Commons were broadly united in favour of further expanding educational and technical assistance, and the debate took on an increasingly ideological character. John Peel, MP for Leicester, stated explicitly that, in the context of the Cold War, "it is vital that we should provide it, because if we do not, I fear that they will look for it behind the Iron Curtain or behind the Bamboo Curtain" [31]. This clearly demonstrates that educational assistance had long ceased to be merely a matter of social welfare and had acquired an explicit political and ideological significance. As the British scholar Gordon Cumming observed, "Western industrialised countries used their overseas aid programmes, or a portion thereof, to deter developing states from aligning themselves with the Soviet bloc" [34]. Educational assistance, therefore, served not only the economic and social modernisation of East Africa but also became an important instrument through which Britain sought to preserve its ideological influence amid the broader process of decolonization.

Finally, whether the East African colonies would remain eligible for assistance under the framework of the Colonial Development and Welfare Acts after achieving independence became another key issue in parliamentary debates. The draft of the 1959 Act stipulated that "any territory which becomes independent will cease to be eligible for colonial development and welfare assistance" [31]. Many MPs, however, pointed out that an abrupt termination of loan finance upon independence could bring particular development projects in East Africa to a standstill and render funds already committed or borrowed largely ineffective. Edward Astley therefore argued that the restriction on eligibility should apply only to grants and not to loans, so that East African countries could continue to benefit from the new Act after attaining independence and joining the Commonwealth. Following sustained pressure from MPs and increasingly detailed parliamentary debate, the British Government ultimately retained a degree of discretion for case-by-case treatment, deciding that eligibility would be determined in light of the actual circumstances prevailing at the time of each territory's independence. Where a colony attained independence, funds previously provided under Colonial Development and Welfare schemes could be converted into Commonwealth assistance so as to ensure continuity in financial arrangements across the transition to independence. At the same time, the committee altered the status of Treasury loans, which were no longer to be counted as part of the Colonial Development and Welfare Fund. It is therefore evident that, although the 1959 Act retained the title of "Colonial Development and Welfare," its practical functions had already begun to extend beyond the traditional framework of colonial assistance. By creating institutional scope for continued support within the Commonwealth after independence, the Act also reflected the growing flexibility of British aid policy.

Overall, the process leading to the enactment of the Colonial Development and Welfare Act 1959 vividly reflected the divisions among Britain's political elites over how to respond to imperial decline. Some officials favoured an expansion of aid as a means of sustaining Britain's imperial responsibilities and preserving its image as a great power, while other MPs stressed the fiscal constraints underlying such commitments. The contest between these two positions ultimately produced a more flexible aid policy: at the rhetorical level, the British Government continued to emphasize its responsibilities as a donor, while in practice it increasingly adopted a case-by-case approach, substituting loans and educational and technical assistance for grants. Politically, the British Government continued to uphold the language of imperial responsibility; institutionally, however, it created room for the adjustment of aid arrangements after colonial independence. This persistent tension between commitments to imperial responsibility and pressures for fiscal retrenchment also ensured that the implementation of the 1959 Act in East Africa would remain beset by continuing policy dilemmas.

2.3 Operational Dilemmas of Flexible Aid Policy in East Africa

The passage of the Colonial Development and Welfare Act 1959 marked a shift in British aid to East Africa from a rigid model intended to sustain colonial rule towards a more flexible approach. This adjustment, however, remained constrained throughout by the deepening crisis of British colonial rule. Decolonization in East Africa proceeded faster than the British Government had anticipated, gradually eroding the political and institutional foundations on which the revised aid policy depended. Internal contradictions within the loan mechanism and the declining effectiveness of aid spending compounded these policy difficulties. The Act's failure to halt the decline of British influence thus stemmed primarily from the continuing erosion of the colonial order on which its aid framework depended.

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First, although the 1959 Act increased the amount authorised for aid, assistance provided under the Colonial Development and Welfare framework accounted for only a limited share of total British aid to East Africa. Between 1961 and 1962, total British assistance to Kenya amounted to £15.2 million, of which only £2.3 million came from Colonial Development and Welfare funds, including both grants and loans. Tanganyika received £9.6 million in total assistance, but only £3.1 million was provided under the Act, while the corresponding figures for Uganda were £6.6 million and £1.6 million, respectively [35]. The share of Colonial Development and Welfare assistance continued to decline, as an increasing proportion of aid was obtained through alternative channels.

Second, the share of grants in British assistance continued to contract, while the proportion provided in the form of loans rose steadily. Between 1945 and 1959, total British aid to East Africa amounted to £71.584 million, of which £18.983 million took the form of loans, accounting for approximately 26.59 per cent of the total. Under the 1959 Act, however, total British aid to East Africa between 1959 and 1963 reached £91.572 million, of which £41.671 million was provided as loans, representing 45.5 per cent of the overall amount. Thus, the volume of loans extended over the four years from 1959 to 1963 exceeded that provided during the preceding twelve postwar years by £22.688 million, while the share of loans in total aid increased by nearly 20 percentage points [36]. At the same time, the growing reliance on large-scale loans, itself a response to the deepening crisis of colonial rule, intensified fiscal pressures in East Africa and further accelerated the region's estrangement from the British Empire. In 1958, East Africa's annual public expenditure exceeded revenue by approximately £1.477 million [37]. The implementation of the 1959 Act not only failed to improve this situation but further aggravated it. Between 1959 and 1961, the annual fiscal deficit widened further. In 1960 in particular, East African revenue amounted to £48.498 million, while expenditure reached £53.846 million. The fiscal balance thus shifted from a surplus of £1.341 million in 1955 to a deficit of £5.348 million in 1960 [38]. This shift in the figures indicates that the institutional arrangements through which Britain sought to preserve its imperial influence under the 1959 Act were gradually losing their practical room for manoeuvre.

More seriously, the growing reliance on loans not only increased the fiscal burden on East Africa but also transformed the moral foundations of British aid policy. During the earlier, preservation-oriented phase of assistance, successive British Governments had generally presented aid as part of the metropolitan power's responsibility for colonial development. Although grants were limited in scale, they nevertheless helped sustain, at the rhetorical level, the legitimacy of Britain's claimed imperial obligations. As loans came to account for an ever larger share of assistance, however, the relationship increasingly shifted from one of responsibility to one of indebtedness, with East African territories transformed from recipients of aid into borrowers obliged to repay. This change not only reduced the appeal of British assistance to East African political elites but also provided nationalist forces with grounds for criticising its exploitative economic character, further damaging Britain's prestige in the region.

In addition, Britain's efforts to promote private capital investment in East Africa produced only limited results. Between 1957 and 1959, total private capital inflows into East Africa were estimated at £40 million [39]. For 1958–1960, the estimated figure was £15 million, roughly equal to the amount of government loans provided [37]. Between 1959 and 1961, private capital inflows were estimated at £20 million, well below the £33 million in loans provided by the Treasury [38]. The sluggish growth of private capital was closely related to the accelerating process of decolonization in East Africa. As political prospects became increasingly uncertain, and in the absence of adequate mechanisms to guarantee returns, private investors generally adopted a wait-and-see attitude. This outcome clearly ran counter to the British Government's original intention of using private capital to compensate for the limitations of official assistance and further weakened the practical contribution of British aid to East Africa's development.

Beyond the difficulties surrounding the institutional application of the Act, British aid policy also encountered multiple operational obstacles in practice. More specifically, although British assistance contributed to development in a number of sectors across East Africa, it also deepened the region's structural development problems. In the field of agricultural assistance, the 1959 Act largely continued the policy orientation of the Swynnerton Plan, with the expansion of East African agricultural exports as a principal objective. Yet this export-oriented model increasingly directed local agricultural production towards cash crops intended for European markets, diverting attention from the goals of safeguarding domestic food security and promoting greater diversification of the agricultural economy. As the Guyanese historian Walter Rodney later observed critically, "The most decisive failure of colonialism in Africa was its failure to change the

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technology of agricultural production. … the vast majority of Africans went into colonialism with a hoe and came out with a hoe" [40]. As a result, the pattern of agricultural development shaped by British aid policy gradually became, after East African independence, a structural constraint on the region's pursuit of greater economic autonomy. This also further exposed the inherent limitations of Britain's flexible aid policy in promoting the long-term development of recipient countries.

In the field of educational assistance, the Royal Technical College of East Africa, University College of East Africa, and University College Dar es Salaam became important beneficiaries of British support for higher education in East Africa under the framework of the 1959 Act. Among them, the Royal Technical College of East Africa, renamed the Royal College, Nairobi, on 25 June 1961, received more British assistance than any other East African university-level institution between 1959 and 1963. Under the framework of the 1959 Act, the British Government devised a relatively systematic programme of assistance for the College. Between 1960 and 1963, approximately £1.0804 million in British assistance was approved for the institution, with the precise figure amounting to £1,080,464. Of this total, around £625,207 was allocated to the purchase and development of land and to the construction or renovation of teaching buildings, warehouses, and other infrastructure. A further £361,832 was devoted to the construction of student accommodation for men and women, as well as housing for staff. In addition, equipment and books valued at approximately £92,925 were authorised for the College [41]. Although this assistance improved the infrastructure of East African institutions of higher education, their educational model continued to follow British curricula and intellectual values, placing greater emphasis on the cultivation of pro-British elites than on responding adequately to East Africa's own developmental needs.

At the same time, the growing involvement of the United States in East African education further weakened Britain's influence in this sphere. In December 1960, with funding from the Carnegie Foundation, the American Council on Education convened a conference on higher education in East Africa at Princeton, promoting the development of a regional university system and, to some extent, contributing to the establishment of University College Dar es Salaam in 1961. Following Tanganyika's independence in December of that year, its development programmes gradually moved beyond the framework of Colonial Development and Welfare assistance. Thereafter, the Nyerere Government began a systematic reassessment of the education system inherited from colonial rule, criticising it for producing an educated elite detached from productive labour. Under the policy of self-reliance established by the 1967 Arusha Declaration, the government advanced the principle of "Education for Self-Reliance" and sought to reconstruct an educational system better suited to the country's own social and developmental needs. As East African states achieved political independence and increasingly asserted their own developmental priorities, the scope for Britain to preserve its educational and ideological influence through aid correspondingly narrowed. The cultural and institutional limitations of Britain's flexible aid policy thus became increasingly apparent.

In the fields of medical and social-service assistance, the implementation of the 1959 Act likewise revealed the limitations of British aid policy. British support for medical research in East Africa was concentrated primarily on the prevention and control of tropical diseases, and its objectives continued, to some extent, to serve the maintenance of a healthy colonial labour force rather than the comprehensive improvement of local public health. Between 1959 and 1960, the British Government approved approximately £33,500 in assistance for the East African Trypanosomiasis Research Organization, with the precise figure amounting to £33,504 [42]. Subsequently, a further £3,140 was approved for research into the serological relationships of trypanosomes and related immunological studies. The control of tsetse flies also remained a major medical challenge in East Africa, and between 1959 and 1961 Britain provided £6,109 in assistance for relevant research projects. Although British support for disease research in East Africa bore a clear imprint of colonial governance, it also generated a certain scientific and institutional legacy. Constrained by its limited scale and coverage, such assistance remained concentrated on research into specific tropical diseases and was therefore unable to address the broader medical and public-health needs of East African societies. Nevertheless, the research capacity, institutional resources, and professional expertise accumulated through these projects provided an important foundation for the development of medical research and public-health system in East Africa after independence.

From a long-term perspective, the aid model shaped by the Colonial Development and Welfare Act 1959 had a dual character. On the one hand, British aid contributed to infrastructure development, the expansion of education, growth in agricultural production, and improvements in public services across East Africa, while

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also helping to lay the material and institutional foundations for post-independence state-building. On the other hand, such aid remained subordinated to Britain's broader strategic objectives of safeguarding its economic interests, political influence, and Commonwealth ties. The way aid was allocated and the development priorities it supported therefore left the structural imbalances inherited from the colonial economy largely intact. The persistence after independence of a narrow export structure, a weak industrial base, heavy debt burdens, and limited technological capacity constituted important legacies of this development model. More profoundly, the aid relationships established during the colonial period reinforced East Africa's path dependence on British, and more broadly Western, capital, technology, markets, and models of development, with the result that political independence did not immediately translate into economic autonomy. British aid thus produced certain short-term gains, but failed to generate a stable and sustainable development mechanism. Instead, the accumulation of structural imbalances and path dependence intensified its internal contradictions and increasingly exposed the fragility of the model itself.

This underlying fragility became increasingly apparent as the pace of decolonization in East Africa accelerated. The region's postwar political transformation proceeded far more rapidly than Britain had anticipated, while the development paths adopted by the newly independent states increasingly diverged from British policy expectations. Under Julius Nyerere, Tanganyika pursued the socialist policy of Ujamaa, emphasizing economic self-reliance and a non-aligned foreign policy. Kenya, although broadly maintaining a pro-Western orientation, likewise refused to subordinate fully its positions on land, economic interests, and national sovereignty to British priorities. At the same time, the indigenous elites cultivated through British educational assistance did not become stable carriers of imperial institutional influence. Rather, in the process of nation-building, they increasingly placed national sovereignty and autonomous development above the maintenance of a special relationship with Britain. As Tanganyika, Uganda, and Kenya successively achieved independence, the territorial scope of the Colonial Development and Welfare Acts steadily contracted, while the colonial institutional foundations on which the system depended simultaneously disintegrated. By this stage, Britain's attempt to use aid to delay political disengagement and preserve its institutional influence had progressively lost its practical basis. The declining effectiveness of the aid mechanism therefore reflected not merely the limitations of a particular policy instrument, but a broader erosion of Britain's capacity to sustain the existing imperial order through economic and institutional means. In this sense, the weakening of the aid system became an important manifestation of the decline of British imperial power in East Africa.

2.4 The Failure of the 1959 Act and the Historical Logic of British Imperial Decline

Viewed from a broader historical perspective, the trajectory of the Colonial Development and Welfare Act 1959—from its formulation and enactment to its implementation and eventual loss of effectiveness—not only reflected the adjustment of British aid policy, but also revealed an important dimension of imperial decline. As direct colonial rule became increasingly difficult to sustain, Britain sought to reconstruct imperial relationships through the language and mechanisms of "development" and "aid", thereby preserving its influence in East Africa at a lower political and economic cost. In this sense, the 1959 Act may be regarded as an institutional attempt to preserve the empire amid its postwar decline. The Act, however, ultimately failed to alter the course of imperial disintegration. On 31 July 1963, the British Parliament amended the 1959 legislation and renamed it the Commonwealth Development Act 1963, marking the formal transition of Britain's aid relationship with East Africa from a colonial framework to that of the Commonwealth. Thereafter, as decolonization advanced, this system of imperial assistance had largely come to an end by 1970. Its evolution thus reflected the widening gap between Britain's imperial ambitions and its diminishing national capacity.

First, at the level of institutional design, the Colonial Development and Welfare Act 1959 reflected Britain's attempt to reshape imperial relations through aid. After the Second World War, British colonial policy was increasingly recast in the language of "welfare" "development" and "responsibility" yet assistance continued to serve Britain's own economic and strategic interests. In the early postwar years, Britain provided funds to the colonies through the Colonial Development and Welfare Acts while simultaneously drawing on colonial sterling balances to support domestic economic recovery, thereby creating a persistent tension between colonial "development" and imperial interests. The 1959 Act did not alter this underlying logic, but merely modified the means through which it was pursued. By expanding the use of loans and incorporating private capital and external funding, Britain transformed traditional fiscal assistance into a more flexible institutional

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arrangement. Whenever East Africa's own developmental priorities came into conflict with British interests, the latter continued to take precedence. This institutional innovation therefore left imperial power relations largely intact; it was instead an adjustment made necessary by the growing difficulty of sustaining traditional colonial rule.

Second, from the perspective of Britain's domestic political and economic capacity, the 1959 Act further exposed the widening contradiction between imperial ambitions and national resources. In the postwar period, Britain continued to aspire to great-power status and to uphold extensive overseas commitments. Yet the construction of the welfare state, economic reconstruction, balance-of-payments difficulties, and continuing strategic obligations abroad placed growing pressure on limited fiscal resources, with colonial assistance increasingly subjected to calculations of cost and return. Britain did not abandon its desire to preserve influence in East Africa, but it became progressively less capable of bearing the costs required to do so. This produced a policy dilemma that proved increasingly difficult to resolve: sustaining imperial influence demanded continued expenditure, while the decline of national power simultaneously compelled Britain to reduce spending and disperse responsibility. By the mid- to late 1960s, as economic and fiscal pressures intensified further, this contradiction became even more pronounced. The continuing contraction of aid policy therefore represented not merely a shift in policy orientation, but a concrete manifestation of the fact that Britain's national capacity could no longer sustain its existing imperial ambitions.

Third, from the perspective of comparative imperial history, Britain was not the only colonial power that sought to delay imperial disintegration through institutional reconstruction. After the Second World War, France established the French Union in a similar attempt to retain its overseas territories within a political and economic system centred on the metropole. As Tony Chafer, a British scholar, has observed, "The whole thrust of French policy after the Second World War had been to create a French Union in which the overseas territories were indissolubly linked to the métropole. Within the Union, France sought to remake imperialism by creating a modern Africa in its own image" [43]. Although Britain's 1959 Act differed from the institutional arrangements adopted by France, it reflected a similar historical logic. As direct colonial rule became increasingly difficult to sustain, the metropolitan powers turned to development assistance, institutional linkages, and economic cooperation in an attempt to transform formal empire into a more flexible system of influence. Yet such institutional restructuring could not fundamentally resolve the crisis of legitimacy inherent in colonial rule, nor could it arrest the growth of African nationalism and assertions of national sovereignty. What it altered, therefore, was primarily the manner and pace of imperial withdrawal rather than the broader trajectory of imperial decline.

Finally, viewed within the broader process of imperial decline, the historical significance of the 1959 Act lies precisely in the ultimate failure of this attempt at institutional self-preservation. Britain did not simply seek to withdraw from East Africa. Rather, while relinquishing direct administrative control, it attempted to preserve its economic, institutional, and cultural influence through Commonwealth ties and through educational, technical, and financial assistance. Yet the pace of political change in East Africa soon outstripped British expectations. As Tanganyika, Uganda, and Kenya successively achieved independence, their governments placed growing emphasis on national sovereignty, autonomous development, and an independent foreign policy, thereby eroding the colonial political foundations on which the Colonial Development and Welfare Acts had depended. By this stage, Britain was no longer confronting a limited problem that could be remedied through adjustments to aid policy. Instead, the economic capacity, political legitimacy, and institutional foundations required to sustain empire were all undergoing fundamental transformation. The trajectory of the 1959 Act, from policy adjustment to eventual loss of effectiveness, therefore demonstrates that although Britain could alter the means by which it sought to preserve empire, it could no longer alter the direction of imperial decline.

The failure of the 1959 Act, therefore, should not be attributed simply to flaws in the formulation of aid policy, but must be understood within the broader historical process of British imperial decline. Confronted with the weakening of empire, Britain did not merely retreat passively. Rather, it sought to reconstruct imperial relations by making aid policy more flexible, relinquishing direct rule while attempting to preserve its economic, institutional, and cultural influence. The substitution of loans for grants, the use of Commonwealth ties to succeed colonial rule, and the continuation of educational and technical assistance as vehicles of cultural influence all reflected this effort to preserve imperial influence at a lower cost. Yet this policy was beset by a series of inherent contradictions that proved increasingly difficult to resolve. The British Government sought

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both to reduce the fiscal burden of maintaining empire and to sustain a sufficient level of assistance to preserve its strategic presence; it acknowledged the movement of East Africa towards self-government and independence while simultaneously hoping to keep the region embedded within institutional networks dominated by Britain; and it attempted to reconstruct the legitimacy of imperial relations through the language of "development," while remaining unable to escape a policy orientation centred on British national interests. The greater the flexibility of aid policy became, the more clearly it revealed that the resources and instruments on which the traditional empire had depended were no longer sustainable. Its eventual failure thus represented a concentrated expression of the structural divergence between Britain's imperial ambitions and its declining national capacity.

In this sense, the Colonial Development and Welfare Act 1959 provides an important lens through which to understand the decline of the British Empire. The end of the empire was not a linear process in which Britain simply abandoned its colonies; rather, it was a prolonged process of adjustment, reconstruction, and repeated attempts to preserve imperial relationships, even as Britain steadily lost the capacity to sustain them. Aid policy was once regarded as a new means of extending imperial influence after the retreat from direct rule. Yet under the combined pressures of rising nationalism, the growing force of the principle of national sovereignty, and Britain's relative decline in power, aid could do little more than shape the manner and tempo of imperial withdrawal; it could not reverse the broader trajectory of imperial decline. This, in turn, reveals the deeper logic of the British Empire's dissolution. Despite Britain's efforts to adapt its institutions and preserve its imperial position, the empire came to an end because the economic strength, political legitimacy, and institutional foundations underpinning imperial rule had undergone fundamental transformation. During this transitional period, when Britain's imperial power was steadily diminishing while its imperial aspirations had not yet entirely disappeared, policy innovation could reshape only the form of imperial decline; it could no longer preserve the empire itself.

3. Conclusion

The adjustment of British aid policy towards East Africa was deeply embedded in the tension between the postwar decline of imperial power and Britain's continuing strategic desire to preserve its overseas influence. From 1957 onward, confronted with the rise of East African nationalism, the mounting costs of colonial rule, and intensifying domestic fiscal pressures, the Macmillan Government began to reassess its traditional model of assistance. Growing American involvement intensified competition for influence in East Africa, reinforcing the pressures for policy change. At the same time, American aid offered a potential source of finance and expertise that could ease the demands on Britain's limited resources. This encouraged British ministers and parliamentarians to favour cooperation with the United States, other donors, and international institutions as a means of sharing development costs. The passage of the Colonial Development and Welfare Act 1959 marked a shift from a preservation-oriented form of colonial aid towards a more flexible mode of post-imperial assistance. Although this adjustment temporarily supported the development of infrastructure, education, and public services in East Africa and helped sustain British influence, its effectiveness remained constrained by the deepening crisis of colonial rule. Britain's limited aid capacity and divergent developmental priorities compounded these policy difficulties, while the accelerating transition to independence further eroded the aid framework's institutional foundations. Its underlying contradictions therefore remained unresolved. The expansion of American financial and educational assistance, alongside the involvement of other external actors, widened the sources of support available to East African recipients. As these states increasingly pursued their own development priorities after independence, the British Government's ability to shape the regional aid agenda and direct the allocation of resources steadily weakened. The strategy of substituting aid for direct rule and using Commonwealth ties to perpetuate imperial influence ultimately proved incapable of reversing the broader trajectory of British imperial decline. At the same time, British assistance to East Africa involved more than the transfer of capital and technical expertise; it also entailed the diffusion of institutional models, frameworks of knowledge, and systems of values. The historical legacy of the 1959 Act therefore extends beyond questions of economic dependence, drawing attention to the more subtle forms of institutional, cultural, and epistemic power embedded within aid relationships.

A review of the entire trajectory of the Colonial Development and Welfare Act 1959 reveals that aid can serve both as a mechanism for promoting development and improving interstate relations and, when subordinated to the strategic objectives of donor countries, as an instrument for preserving existing

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asymmetries of power. Although contemporary international assistance, as well as cultural and "soft power" cooperation, has changed profoundly in form, inequalities in agenda-setting, standard-setting, and knowledge production may still generate new forms of dependency. Donor countries should therefore respect the developmental autonomy of recipient states and define the objectives and scale of assistance in a reasonable manner. Recipient countries, for their part, should safeguard their ability to shape their own cultural development and to assess and use knowledge independently while drawing on external capital, technology, and knowledge. Only by moving beyond a one-directional logic of power and advancing aid practices on the basis of equal consultation, mutual benefit, and autonomous development can assistance genuinely contribute to the shared development of both sides.

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