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*The Bottom Billion* by Paul Collier

Collier's book *The Bottom Billion* offered a fresh and direct analysis of how we currently treat developing countries versus how we should actually approach aid and development. Collier's background in development began in economics— he started as a World Bank economist and now is the director of the Center of the Study of African Economies. His economic background not only gives him an inside perspective when it comes to analyzing aid, but a inclusive look at what we're doing wrong and what we can do to make it right.

The entire book is based upon the concept in the title: "the bottom billion." Collier states that there are essentially 5 billion people who need aid and assistance. However, you can divide this group into two categories: those who are in "developing" nations and those who are in countries that are either not developing and getting worse. About 4 billion fall into the "developing" category and about one billion fall into the latter. Collier believes that it's that latter category, the bottom billion, that needs to be the focus of our aid efforts.

Collier offers interesting insights into the current structure of the world. He says that we're on the path to having "one-sixth-rich, two-thirds O.K. and one-sixth poor." In that one-sixth, the bottom billion, the poverty and disparity is extreme. Around one in seven children dies before the age of 5.

Collier feels that this bottom billion is at an extreme disadvantage. He identifies that they're different from other developing nations because the economic shambles that barely hold the country together have created a "conflict trap" that holds the country in a permanent detriment. The economic conditions of the country make them prone to civil war and violence that, once started, is difficult to escape.

Throughout the book, Collier exuberantly introduces his ideas and concepts for development and aid. He identified the concept of the "headless heart" approach to aid and development— rich people approaching the problems of developing nations, especially Africa, with more emotion than evidence. He used his economic evidence and broad research to develop his two part theory for aid. Collier believes that we should "narrow the target and broaden the instruments." By "narrowing the target," Collier wants those in power to focus aid efforts on the bottom billion and by "broadening the instruments," Collier feels that we should shift our focus from direct aid

to enhancement of policy instruments like better aid delivery, occasional military intervention, international charters and smarter trade policy.

Collier identifies four traps into which the poorest of the poor countries tend to fall: civil war, the “resource curse,” location and bad governance.

Civil war, Collier states, occurs because of a combination of high numbers of young, uneducated men, an imbalance of ethnic groups and a supply of natural resources that encourages and finances rebellion. His second trap, the “resource curse,” references that natural resources of a country that keep the rich rich and the poor *very* poor. He references countries like Nigeria, with abundant mineral wealth, who don’t have to levy taxes and thus have lower pressures on their government. Collier believes that landlocked countries are at a disadvantage because they depend on neighboring countries for trade. Finally, he blames government figures for a general lack of responsibility when it comes to economic collapses and subsequent recovery.

Overall, Collier offered a practical and refreshing insight into the way that development needs to change. After reading this book, I felt more enlightened about the practicality of aid and what we need to do to change. Instead of handouts and donations, we need to narrow the focus of our efforts and “sharpen the tools” to kickstart the development amongst the bottom billion that has been aching to happen.