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Kitula, Lucas; Kragelund, Peter; Mukangara, Daudi ; Richey, Lisa Ann; Sulley, Consolata Rafael

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Elite Giving in Everyday Humanitarianism

Lucas Kitula, Peter Kragelund, Daudi Mukangara,
Lisa Ann Richey, Consolata Rafael Sulley

Overview

The humanitarian sector is challenged by chronic underfunding. Thus, when Tanzania faces recurrent humanitarian challenges caused by pandemics, epidemics, earthquakes, floods, droughts, and conflicts in neighboring countries, ordinary citizens often step in as first (and often only) responders in these humanitarian crises. This policy brief highlights insights from a five-year research project on everyday humanitarianism in Tanzania. The study focused on the ‘expanded series of practices in the everyday lives of citizens that purport to make a difference outside the traditional boundaries of humanitarian activity.’ It sheds light on why ordinary citizens help, how they do it and whom they assist.

Elites play a vital role in these giving practices. By understanding elite giving practices, we also further our understanding of the mutual obligations and moral responsibilities in society and, thus, why people feel compelled to respond to other peoples’ suffering.

The research project has found that Tanzanian elites are being asked daily for help in acute and protracted crises. This is in addition to their usual giving through family, religious and civil society groups. In times of crisis, however, most elites believe that responding is, first and foremost, the government’s responsibility.

Tanzanian elites’ giving practices in response to crisis resemble their day-to-day giving practices in many ways. However, the research findings reveal that elites mobilize exceptional resources for crisis responses like hosting people in their homes, sharing their networks for jobs and help, and giving

basic commodities in kind (food, shelter, transport, etc.).

The research also found that most elites give to people who are known to them, but sometimes, crises mobilize a larger circle of possible recipients. Giving to people you do not know or validate is considered wasteful and unwise. There are social consequences of not giving and also of not giving wisely. Strategizing around who is a viable recipient and validating their needs is thus of utmost importance. Many elites noted the lack of any incentive structure and even a legal disincentive to give that limits the actual level of their contribution during a crisis.

The Way Forward

Elite giving is a huge, often untapped, resource in times of crisis. This is especially the case due to the chronic underfunding of the international humanitarian sector. Therefore, both the Government of Tanzania and the International Humanitarian Actors should engage with this group of first responders.

The Government of Tanzania should:

- Recognize and encourage the contributions of Tanzanian elites during times of crisis.
- Strengthen, communicate and implement tax incentives for contributions during times of crisis.
- Develop mechanisms for policy dialogue that include the experiences of local elites.

The International Humanitarian Actors should:

- Develop mechanisms for policy dialogue that include the experiences of local elites in all of the contexts where they work.
- Continue localization policies in ways that support autonomy and agenda-setting by local actors.
- Enlarge circles of collaboration to include different forms of humanitarian helping that may not directly fit traditional principles of neutrality and impartiality.
- Recognize and attempt to understand local validation processes for wise giving

ABOUT THE PROJECT

Everyday Humanitarianism in Tanzania (EveryHumanTZ) is a joint research project being conducted by researchers from public universities from Denmark and Tanzania aiming to explore and understand the practices of everyday humanitarianism and the attitudes that ground them. The project is based at Copenhagen Business School and at the University of Dar es Salaam, also includes researchers from Danish Institute for International Studies, Roskilde University, University of Copenhagen and London School of Economics. Find out more at <https://www.everydayhumanitarianismintanzania.org/>