

# What If Good Intentions Are Not Good Enough? Ubuntu Youth and the Varying Outcomes of NGO Practices

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## Abstract

This research outlines why Westerners are traveling to Africa to volunteer, how volunteerism is produced, and the good and bad effects of volunteers' work.



## (Questions)

Why are US NGOs serving Africa?  
What are the benefits and harms of US NGOs serving in African countries?  
Are there existing alternatives to US NGOs?



## Methodology

- Spent a semester in Uganda, East Africa, experiencing the spectrum of US NGO practices
- Traveled to Durban, South Africa with Ubuntu Youth
- Became familiar with Ubuntu Youth's practices and ethics as an NGO
- Collected stories from Ubuntu Youth's students
- Read and researched the ethics, benefits, and practices of US NGOs

## Why Africa?

Many US volunteers are driven by compassion

- "Almost 90% of American adults are involved personally or financially in the charity industry" (Lupton 2).
- During travel through Africa, Americans "discovered the American part of themselves" (Mathers 7).

## Benefits of US NGOs

US NGOs often provide poverty relief to individuals using a bottom-up solution.

- Ubuntu Youth advocates for small changes that could lead to sustainable change.
- "Top-down charity seldom works." (Lupton 85)
- US NGOs can value the opinions and ideals of those being served.
- Ubuntu Youth listens and assesses first.
- "There is the principle of first do no harm. There is the idea that those who are being helped ought to be consulted over the matters that concern them" (Cole).

Effective US based NGOs focus on quality, not quantity.

- Ubuntu Youth is relationship centered, not driven by sensationalist numbers.
- US NGOs which aim at sustainability in Africa employ locals.
- Ubuntu Youth leadership is sustained by local leaders from the community.
- Moyo's "Better Road" to sustainability for Africa includes "investing in self-sufficiency, promoting entrepreneurship, and reinforcing productive work" (Lupton 96).

## Potential Harms of US NGOs

US NGOs can create African dependency on Westerners for poverty relief.

- "Over the past thirty years, the most aid-dependent countries have had a negative 0.2 growth rate" (Moyo x).
- When aid growth "was at its peak between 1970-1998, poverty rate in Africa rose from 11% to 66%" (Moyo x).

US NGOs can deplete local agency by doing jobs Africans are capable of doing for themselves, denying Africans agency in changing poverty.

- Ubuntu's local staff determines the direction of projects with the approval of US directors.
- "Initiatives that thwart their development, though rightly motivated, must be restructured to reinforce self sufficiency if they are to become agents of lasting and positive change" (Lupton 102)

Short-term fixes will not fix long term issues of poverty. Relationships and African agency will relieve Africa of its poverty.

- Ubuntu Youth is creating long-term relationships that encourage African agency and stray from short-term volunteerism. Although not sufficient for alleviating poverty, relationships are in place to encourage Africans to take initiative.
- "Africa can only develop through value addition, employment creation, and wealth creation" (Cush 2).

## Alternatives to US NGOs

Policy Changes

Donor money to "good practicing NGOs"  
Self-sustainable African NGOs

## Conclusions

### We Need to do Better at Doing Good

US NGOs in the African continent and the volunteers associated with said NGOs inflict more harm than help by giving handouts, undermining dignity, depleting local agency, and offering short term answers to long term problems.

## References

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