



Diaspora Philanthropy and Changing Landscape of Aid in Africa: The Case of the Zimbabwean Diaspora



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Introduction

The thesis examines how diaspora philanthropy is becoming a key component of decolonized aid futurities and development. What is distinctive about diaspora philanthropy is its linkages with African traditions and cultures of Ubuntu (“nobody goes hungry in the village”). The rise of diaspora philanthropy has the potential to concretize struggles for alternatives and the decolonization of development, exhibiting how Zimbabweans in the diaspora exercise African humanism as an anchor for social responsibility and self-reliance. Additionally, the thesis critically dissects how diaspora philanthropy is different from the white savior donor community to show that decolonization is not just about changing the skin color of the donor but the system and methods need to change as well.

Objectives

To examine how diaspora philanthropy is an alternative that radically upset the aid structure and generates the reconsideration of power dynamics/imbances and enhanced local engagement.

To investigate whether the crux of collaborative and participatory approaches in diaspora philanthropy actually empowers local communities to drive sustainable development

Methodology

The research was anchored in the principles of decolonization as a methodological approach and relationality as an interpretive framework. The research methodology employed a qualitative case study design, which informed the selection of 15 in-depth, semi-structured interviews and key informant interviews. Document review and analysis were also employed as primary methods for data solicitation. For data analysis, the study employed process coding, which kinesthetically facilitated categorization and understanding of the interrelationships embedded in the sense of belonging, culture, and giving patterns. A decolonial approach to research ethics emphasized the importance of relationality and epistemic justice in knowledge production.

Findings

- **Shift from Remittances to Philanthropy:** The study highlights a significant shift within the Zimbabwean diaspora from personal remittances to structured philanthropic activities aimed at community development.
- **Decolonization of Aid:** The thesis argues that diaspora philanthropy offers a decolonized alternative to Western aid, rooted in African traditions like Ubuntu and collective self-reliance.
- **Cultural Revitalization:** Through popular arts, digital media, and cultural events, diaspora philanthropy preserves heritage, empowers youth, and creates alternative employment opportunities—countering unemployment and drug abuse.
- **Diaspora Corporate Social Responsibility:** Investments such as clinics, schools, and water projects reflect a holistic model of giving back—rooted in Ubuntu, kinship, and community responsibility.
- **Challenges and Risks:** While diaspora philanthropy holds great potential, the study acknowledges the risks of corruption and the need for transparency and accountability. The paradox: while framed as solidarity and empowerment, some diaspora investments replicate exploitative capitalist logics rather than dismantling them.
- **Relational Solidarity:** The research emphasizes the importance of relational solidarity, where the collective well-being of the community takes precedence over individual gains.
- **Bridging University & Community:** Philanthropy turns academic knowledge into practical products and services—bringing the university to the community, and vice versa.

Analysis

- **Roots & Epistemology:** Diaspora philanthropy in Zimbabwe is anchored in Ubuntu, indigenous values, and communal traditions—not merely Western models of giving.
- **Beyond Money:** Contributions go beyond financial remittances to include social remittances (ideas, practices, skills, and cultural capital).
- **Decolonial Dimension:** Challenges Western-centric philanthropy frameworks by reclaiming African narratives, practices, and kinship systems.
- **Relational Solidarity:** Rejects nuclear-family exclusivity, embracing broader kinship and community care structures rooted in African social organization.
- **Contrast with Western Philanthropy:** Unlike Carnegie/Rockefeller traditions (wealth-first, give-later), African giving emphasizes solidarity even with little resources—“philanthropy of the poor.”

Conclusion

- **Diaspora philanthropy as decolonial practice:** The Zimbabwean diaspora is redefining philanthropy by rooting it in African cultural values, Ubuntu, and relational solidarity, thereby challenging Western-centric aid models.
- **Community-driven development:** Diaspora initiatives demonstrate agility, inclusivity, and sustainability by responding directly to community needs through informal yet impactful mechanisms that preserve identity and self-reliance.
- **Government’s enabling role:** For long-term sustainability, the Zimbabwean state must build trust, remove bureaucratic barriers, and foster genuine partnerships with the diaspora as a development ally.
- **Beyond philanthropy to systemic change:** While diaspora efforts are vital, sustainable national transformation ultimately depends on political reform, strong institutions, and inclusive governance that address corruption and entrenched mistrust.

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