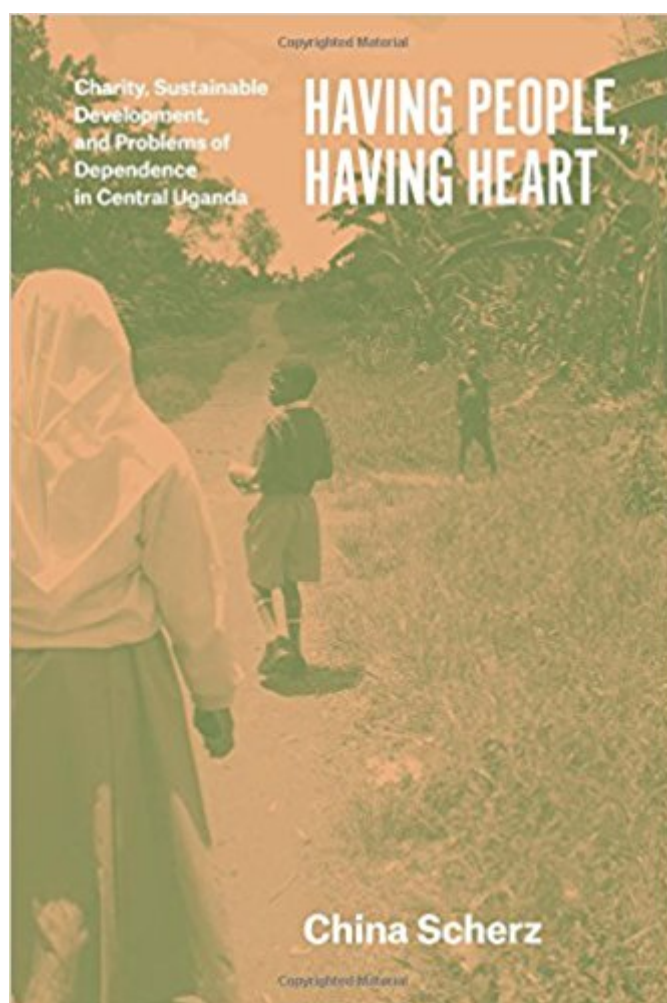


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Having People, Having Heart: Charity, Sustainable Development, And Problems Of Dependence In Central Uganda



Synopsis

Believing that charity inadvertently legitimates social inequality and fosters dependence, many international development organizations have increasingly sought to replace material aid with efforts to build self-reliance and local institutions. But in some cultures—like those in rural Uganda, where “Having People, Having Heart” takes place—people see this shift not as an effort toward empowerment but as a suspect refusal to redistribute wealth. Exploring this conflict, China Scherz balances the negative assessments of charity that have led to this shift with the viewpoints of those who actually receive aid. Through detailed studies of two different orphan support organizations in Uganda, Scherz shows how many Ugandans view material forms of Catholic charity as deeply intertwined with their own ethics of care and exchange. With a detailed examination of this overlooked relationship in hand, she reassesses the generally assumed paradox of material aid as both promising independence and preventing it. The result is a sophisticated demonstration of the powerful role that anthropological concepts of exchange, value, personhood, and religion play in the politics of international aid and development.

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Customer Reviews

“Having People, Having Heart” is a fascinating and original book that unsettles preconceptions and social science theories about the evils of charity. Scherz convincingly shows how Ugandan nuns’ practices of charity, which center not upon autonomy but on interdependence, are a better fit with the relational ethics of the region than are NGO workers’ practices of development. This regional ethics of

interdependence prescribes correct (and correctly flexible) relations between patron and client. In such a worldview charity is no insult and independence from others no laudable goal. (Claire Wendland, University of Wisconsin-Madison) “Having People, Having Heart is a profound ethnographic interrogation of sustainable development and Christian charity in Uganda. Breaking new ground in the anthropology of ethics, Scherz explores how local commitment to the morality of patron-client relationships troubles the ethical ambitions that drive NGO work. In a text that is at once ethnographically complex and exceptionally well argued, and that attends as much to the ethics of institutional as to personal life, she offers the kind of analysis of the politics and morality of aid in the contemporary world that reminds us why anthropology remains a crucial discipline going forward. (Joel Robbins, University of Cambridge) “Scherz contrasts the group that she calls Hope Child, a local NGO committed to the paradigm of sustainable development, with the work of the Franciscan sisters of Mercy House, a home for vulnerable children, the disabled, and the elderly. By placing these organizations alongside each other, Scherz is able to bring out the underlying logics of exchange that inform charity and sustainable development, as well as the techniques and technologies that transform these logics into projects of ethical self-formation. . . . In the final paragraphs of her book, Scherz urges readers who are concerned with helping the poor to position themselves in such a way as to make relationships of dependence possible, to [be] someone others might attach themselves to. This is a radical reevaluation of the term dependence, which has so long been the bugbear of development efforts. Rather than willing those in poverty to be able to help themselves, one commits to being a helper; rather than decrying such assistance as unsustainable, one commits to sustaining it. Here small acts emerge as compelling because they are socially productive, giving rise to the sort of relationships that have the power to effect real change that, importantly, resonates especially well in many of the places where development projects are positioned. (Books & Culture) “Challenges current international development norms and standards, suggesting that Ugandans see those norms as suspect refusals to redistribute wealth. (Washington Post)

China Scherz is assistant professor of anthropology at the University of Virginia.

This is a book about aid and development operations in Uganda. As someone who is involved in a couple of Ugandan communities -- albeit remotely, I found this a fascinating read, especially because it challenges a number of the standard view of what constitutes more or less effective

development aid in East Africa. Over the past decades, there has been a shift, in aid donors, from emphasizing charity to emphasizing "sustainable development". The thought driving this is that charity promotes dependency, sustainable actions enable people to provide for themselves. (Essentially the difference between "give a man a fish" and "teach a man to fish." Scherz argues several things, but primarily that Ugandan society is based on patronage relationships, in which the wealthier are expected to provide for the poor in exchange for loyalty (and labor) and the shift away from charity has been viewed by Ugandans as mean spirited and discrediting. Additionally, sustainability creates a focus on accountability and reporting in which the bureaucratic trappings of delivering aid are the most sustainable element, with a loss of focus on those needing aid. For instance, she describes how reporting on barriers to project success becomes an end in itself, while workers lose sight of overcoming those barriers. My assumption is that this book was Ms. Scherz' doctoral dissertation. The first chapter, which presents the theoretical underpinnings of her work is a bit of slog for those who find academic social science theory, with its emphasis on creating new words -- "problematize" -- unimpressive. Fortunately I rejected the temptation to put the book aside and found that starting in Chapter 2 the rest of the book has much more of a journalistic style that tells vivid stories in a readable fashion. I am trying to help a multi-religious Ugandan women's collective develop its western market. I don't know that Ms. Scherz has brought us to a new way to deliver aid, but I will think long and hard about what she wrote when I am in Uganda next year. I understand better that while we strive to help the collective create a long-term income source, there is substantial value in our bringing shoes for the village children, who need them to school... and that this act of charity not only does not undermine sustainability, but actually reinforces my role in the village. It often is difficult for a white person in Africa to get Africans to talk openly with them, as opposed to trying to say what they think you want to hear. Ms. Scherz has given voice to many Ugandans and by doing that she has made a real contribution

This book is a fascinating, close-up look at the effects of different types of aid to the poor in Uganda. The writer infuses her prose with feeling and yet maintains the objectivity of an anthropologist. The writing is clear and descriptive; it is easy to visualize the situations described. Excellent!

Exceptional look at a part of East Africa we're very familiar with. Even though the names are changed, we appreciated the history shared and the background of people and places.

Extremely well written book. Very interesting and new outlook on NGO work in Africa. I highly

recommend.

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