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Volunteering for a Job: Creativity and Tanzanian Youth

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Abstract

This paper explores motivations behind voluntary activities of youth in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, during an increasingly common period of 'waithood,' characterized by prolonged status as youth and delay in adulthood due to challenges with unemployment. Drawing on ethnographic anthropological fieldwork conducted in 2019, this paper uses stories of two youths from two youth-led organizations located in Dar es Salaam to explore differing motivations for engaging in volunteering. These examples illustrate how volunteering either acts as a stepping-stone to future employment or as a replacement for formal employment, dependent on class identity. It is argued that for Tanzanian youths, volunteering is a creative response to the challenges of waithood. This paper suggests that policymakers and civil society organizations addressing youth issues in Tanzania should recognize the diverse motivations and creative and strategic dimensions of volunteering to better support young people in navigating waithood and their futures.

Keywords

Youth; Volunteering; Tanzania; Creativity; Waithood

Introduction¹

On a late afternoon with the perfect shade of blue sky and large cotton ball clouds characteristic of Dar es Salaam, we waited, sitting next to a large dirt field peppered with potholes and dust tornados sweeping across the surface. The field is mostly empty; a few people are cutting across along the paths worn down through the overgrown patches of weeds on their way to the market, but the field is not their destination.

Shortly, the school will let out, and hundreds of schoolchildren will fill this now quiet, desert-like space with their brightly colored t-shirts and tattered tennis shoes. The two older youths² sitting with me get up to untangle the hole-riddled football³ nets, set out the dusty orange cones, and draw lines in the dirt with a stick.

These two youth represent the many young Tanzanians living in Dar es Salaam and struggling with unemployment. As we sit there, waiting together, these two young people embody Alcinda Honwana's concept of 'waithood', defined as a period of 'prolonged adolescence or an involuntary delay in reaching adulthood, in which young people are unable to find employment, get married, and establish their own families' (2012, p. 4). In 2006, compared to the Tanzanian national average unemployment rate of 11.7%, the total unemployment rate in Dar es Salaam for those aged 15 and above was 31.5%. Urban youth consistently have the highest unemployment rates across Tanzania, with those aged 15-24 having an unemployment rate of 39.1% and those aged 25-35 at 69.5% ([National Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Labour, Youth Development, and Sport, & Tanzania Gender Networking Program 2007](#), p. 24). While unemployment rates were improving at the time of this research, the impacts of the global COVID-19 pandemic are yet to be fully realized, and Tanzanians with university degrees have continued to see increasing unemployment rates ([The Guardian 2022](#)).

However, youth in waithood are not passively sitting around, hoping their situations will change. Instead, waithood is a period of dynamism and creativity where youth discover new ways of interacting with society ([Honwana 2012](#); [Tranberg Hansen 2015](#)). And so, while we sit by the field and wait, the two Tanzanian youths will create a football field out of seemingly no actual equipment. Once everything is set up, they will organize the raucous schoolchildren into manageable groups and begin the day's lesson, which is required before the teams can start their battles on the field. For example, today, they have planned an activity about the importance of community for the older youth and a small game about fruits and vegetables for the younger ones. The most impressive thing, however, is that they will do all of this as volunteers.

Literature on youths and volunteering often focuses on motivations for volunteering ([Anderson & Moore 1978](#); [Hustinx & Meijs 2011](#)). Scholars of volunteering present complex arguments about these motivations that vary with age and generation ([Shaw & Dolan 2022](#)) and international versus local dynamics ([Vrasti 2012](#); [Lucas & Jeanes 2019](#); [Smith, Laurie, & Griffiths 2018](#)). Motivations may support various functions based on social desires, values, career improvement, and knowledge attainment ([Clary & Snyder 1999](#); [Meemaduma & Booso 2022](#)).

One of the most prevalent themes when exploring motivations for youth volunteering is the differences between egotistic and altruistic motivations for participation, or self-serving versus charitable ([Shaw & Dolan 2022](#)). Increasingly, scholars argue that volunteering has become part of a more significant global shift towards the marketization of civil society and view the dual roles that volunteers inhabit of self-interest

1 This paper is drawn from my doctoral dissertation, *The Antithesis of 'Business as Usual': Youth, Class and Volunteer Organizations in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania*. University of Kentucky, 2021.

2 According to the Tanzania National Youth Policy, the national definition of youth is 15-35 years of age.

3 Throughout this paper, football is used as the global term for what is known in the US and in some other countries as soccer.

and community engagement as ‘acts of volunteering [that] are embedded in particular economies (and political contexts) and are shaped by a range of motivations’ ([Prince & Brown 2016](#), p. 7). Acknowledging that motivations for voluntary labor do not exist as mutually exclusive dichotomies of self-improvement and altruistic behavior ([Brooks 2007](#)), we see how volunteering is situated in broader cosmopolitan economies of labor and value and how it connects to notions of youth identity, urban society, and future potential ([Prince 2015](#)).

In Tanzania, youth are argued to be motivated to volunteer as they seek alternatives to formal employment through access to labor as ‘full-time volunteers’ ([Brown & Green 2015](#)). For young Tanzanians, upward social mobility toward achieving adulthood is often attained by getting married, having children, or obtaining formal employment. As formal employment opportunities become fewer, Tanzanian youth are disproportionately affected because of their youthhood and lack of experience. As one research participant put it, ‘no experience, no jobs’. Youth, therefore, who continue to be unemployed are finding new paths to their futures through the volunteer sector. While Tanzanian youth across education levels and class statuses seek volunteer opportunities, their voluntary labor will have different motivations related to their different positionalities. Despite motivational differences, however, volunteering may become a required step in this period of waithood for Tanzanian youth in cosmopolitan Dar es Salaam.

This paper first addresses the question of why unemployed young Tanzanians are participating in voluntary labor. The research presented here identifies class identity as an indicator of motivational differences and expected outcomes of their voluntary activities. The following section presents a brief literature review connecting youth identity, unemployment, and volunteering. This is followed by an explanation of the methods used in this research and two ethnographic examples of youth volunteers in Dar es Salaam. A discussion of how class-based motivations for volunteering provide insights into how youth in Dar es Salaam are navigating waithood and unemployment leads to a conclusion suggesting that acknowledging the creative agency being performed by young people to address issues in their own lives through volunteering could potentially inform policy and practice at a larger civil society scale, primarily related to high youth unemployment rates in Tanzania.

Literature Review: Youthhood, Unemployment, and Volunteering in Tanzania

Unemployment has severe consequences for all Tanzanians, but Tanzanian youth experience these consequences uniquely because of their positionality, being thought of as between children and adults. How others define youth and how they view themselves impacts how they navigate the tenuous labor market. Baraka, a 26-year-old male who volunteered at multiple NGOs, described Tanzanian youth as defined by ‘a lack of financial stability, triggered by lack of formal or decent work’. The ability of Tanzanian youth to pass beyond the social categorization of youth into adulthood has become increasingly difficult to achieve ([Cole & Durham 2008](#)).

Defining youth as linked to a lack of employment opportunities was not always the case. [Margaret Mead \(1928\)](#) and other early anthropologists conceptualized youth identity in Samoa as a liminal and transitional state and discussed youth only in relation to the dominant actors and practices in the society: non-youth ([Malinowski 1929](#); [Evans-Pritchard 1940](#); [Turner, Abrahams, & Harris 2017](#)). Turner’s concept of liminality, a period where a person is not who they once were but also not yet who they will become, also captures this idea of an identity in transition, and when applied to processes of aging, understands youth as incomplete people on their way to becoming adults ([Bucholtz 2002](#)).

Interdisciplinary scholars of youth and urban studies have shifted away from focusing on youth solely as a transitory and relational stage, instead considering youth as their own agents that can be understood by their own unique cultural practices and social situations ([Christiansen, Utas, & Vigh 2006](#)), uncovering ‘a portrait

of youth...which encompasses not only a transitional stage on the road to a socially recognized adulthood, but also an identity with its own social and cultural forms' ([Honwana & de Boeck 2005](#), p. x).

This unique identity comes with unique problems. In Tanzania, youth are often involved in the informal labor sector, which employs 88.4% of the population over ten ([Tanzania National Bureau of Statistics 2012](#)). Additionally, the rural-to-urban migration patterns across the region result in highly concentrated youth populations in urban areas like Dar es Salaam ([Sommers 2010](#)). Tanzania has seen the growth of a cosmopolitan middle class as more people engage in non-agricultural work, move to urban areas, and access higher education levels ([Lewinson 2007](#); [Green 2015](#)). Unfortunately, while education opportunities rise across Africa, employment opportunities that utilize the skills of this new population of educated youth are not following suit ([Sommers 2010](#); [DeJaeghere 2017](#)).

Earning a degree, therefore, has a decidedly different meaning for youth today than it did for the previous generation ([Tranberg Hansen 2008](#)). Obtaining an upper-level degree no longer delivers immediate advantages or guaranteed employment over those without access to education; youth struggle to gain employment after graduating ([Moyer 2004](#); [Argenti 2007](#); [Flanagan 2008](#)). Similarly, the youth who have not had the advantage of education face the reality of un- and under-employment. Their lower socio-economic status is reinforced through a lack of access to employment, limiting their opportunities for an economically stable future.

This paper shows how these employment issues result in youth volunteering in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Volunteering, particularly in African countries, has become popular in the shadows of the looming urban unemployment crises. [Compion \(2016\)](#) found across Southern Africa that unemployment and poverty had a positive correlation with participation in volunteering activities, arguing that volunteering 'can offer some unemployed people meaningful, productive participation in social life, a sense of belonging, or an alternative avenue for self-accomplishment' ([Compion 2016](#), p. 80). Drawing on other scholarly work on volunteering, Compion argues that volunteering practices provide benefits other than financial gains, including learning employable skills, making contacts for employment opportunities, and increasing social connections and useable resumé lines ([MacDonald 1996](#); [Putnam 2000](#)).

These same themes of youth and volunteering are present in countries with lower youth unemployment rates. School-age youth across Europe overwhelmingly report resumé building as the most significant motivation for volunteering ([Handy et al. 2010](#)). Additionally, this youth population more often participates in voluntourism and gap year volunteering to improve their future employment prospects, which has resulted in an industry of volunteer brokerage organizations essentially selling volunteer opportunities ([Dean 2014](#)).

While these motivations look very similar in African youth's volunteering practices, the stakes are higher as volunteering becomes the only option when unemployment rates are high. As Brown and Green argue, '...because opportunities for paid employment in the formal labor market are limited, they are also contributing to an expanding and increasingly professionalized volunteering sector' (2015, p. 78). This is a shift from the past. During the 1960s and 1970s, many newly independent African countries relied on the voluntary labor of citizens to encourage national development ([Prince & Brown 2016](#)). Defined by policies and relationships to external development agents, newly independent Tanzania was inextricably linked to discourses of development ([Jennings 2016](#)). In this early postcolonial period in Tanzania, dueling conceptions of volunteerism as either altruistic or service-providing were united in an attempt to create a citizenry founded on equality and self-sacrifice, as well as uniting Tanzanians to help build the nation through participation in providing necessary social services ([Hunter 2015](#)). This was the foundation of Tanzania's post-independence national development program of *ujamaa* (meaning 'togetherness' or 'familyhood') and helped build notions of Tanzanian citizenship in this early postcolonial period.

Today, that connection between volunteering and citizenship identity has shifted, with contemporary volunteering seeming ‘more akin to neoliberal governance, with its emphasis on individual [responsibility] as a means of demonstrating one’s moral worth’ (Prince & Brown 2016, p. 36). The retreat of the state associated with neoliberalism has led to the current increase of both local and international volunteers in many African countries as the need for citizen involvement in administering social services grows (Hunter 2015).

Therefore, emerging themes involving youth volunteering globally are concerned with motivations and demand. In the global South, themes of youth and volunteering are often focused on the relationship between unemployment and voluntary activities. Waitthood provides a lens to explore this moment in time where young Tanzanians are essentially stuck, existing in a state of uncertainty, and limited by the lack of options to move forward with their lives (Honwana 2012). Challenging older definitions of youth that ignore agency, waitthood explains how youth can use their creativity to get by in these times of liminality – through volunteering.

Methods and Background

This paper is adapted from my dissertation (Cutright 2021) and is based on ethnographic anthropological fieldwork in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, in 2019. The most-populated city in East Africa, Dar es Salaam is the economic hub of the nation. It is situated on the coast, cradled around a natural harbor on the Indian Ocean. The landscape of this urban area varies widely from location to location, as do its multicultural inhabitants. Socioeconomic disparities are evident in the contrast of new construction skyscrapers surrounded by expansive slums.

Qualitative data comes from eight months of participant observation and interviews with staff and volunteers of two youth-led organizations – one engaged in sport-for-development work (Beebo) and the other creating animated videos on social issues for community education (Ndege Tanzania).

Ndege Tanzania, founded in 2012, is an organization run by Tanzanian youth that produces educational animated videos on social topics relevant to their local community. During my research, they were implementing several projects through small external grants. For example, one project had them produce animated videos to facilitate community dialogue regarding issues facing people with disabilities (PWD) in Tanzania. Other work included an educational series to be shown in secondary schools in Dar es Salaam that educated schoolchildren about sexual reproductive health (SRH) and menstrual hygiene management (MHM). Ndege was staffed by a group of approximately ten Tanzanian youth who were provided small stipends but often referred to themselves as doing voluntary work because the stipends were neither enough to live on nor consistent. They relied on a large pool of actual volunteers for the remainder of the work. Out of 21 youth volunteers interviewed from Ndege only one did not have a bachelor’s degree. Additionally, one volunteer had a master’s degree, and four were pursuing master’s degrees.

Beebo was founded in 2008 in an underserved area of Dar es Salaam and has grown to operate in four different administrative wards in Kinondoni District. At the time of data collection, youth in the ward where my research was based made up more than 80% of the population (Tanzania National Bureau of Statistics 2012). Beebo’s goal is to reduce poverty in their community through sports and life skills games focusing on the community’s younger members. They sponsor football and netball teams that compete across the region. Children come to the organization to play sports and games, but before they can practice or compete each day, they must participate in compulsory life skills activities. These activities require them to engage in conversations about important community topics, like the importance of education for girls, and practice using life skills, like how to make good nutritional choices. Beebo also runs various community clubs for youth and adults. They rely on volunteer coaches to implement their programs, and often, these coaches were themselves participants in Beebo’s programs. The youth volunteers at this organization

represent the practices of lower-class and less-educated Tanzanian youth engaging in voluntary practices. In stark comparison to Ndege, out of the ten youth volunteers I interviewed at Beebo, only two had bachelor's degrees.

These organizations were identified as research partners through acquaintances and represent differences between youth-led organizations in the more middle-class, urban area of Dar es Salaam versus underserved areas on the city's outskirts. Organizations were required to be led by Tanzanian youths. Pseudonyms are used for the names of organizations and all interviewees. Research approval was granted by the University of Kentucky IRB and the Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology (COSTECH).

This paper utilizes two interviewee's stories as representative examples of the main themes or motivations identified from thirty-four semi-structured interviews conducted. Interviewees were selected based on their connection to the organizations. I interviewed every staff member at each organization and a selection of volunteers from each organization. Staff members were actually also volunteers, but had titles and responsibilities central to the organization's daily work. The sample size was determined by interviewing until saturation, understood as the point at which interviewees presented no new themes (Mason 2010). The interviewees were all Tanzanian citizens except two international interns from one organization. The age range of the interviewees was 19-39 years of age. I interviewed almost twice as many males (n=22) as females (n=12) because more male staff members were employed at both organizations. I used an interview question schedule as a guide. Interviews typically ranged from 45 minutes to an hour and a half and were audio-recorded, transcribed, and thematically analyzed.

INTERVIEWEE'S ROLES AND DEMOGRAPHICS

#	Organization	Role	Age	Gender	Education Level ⁴
1	Ndege TZ	Program Manager	28	F	Masters (TZ)
2	Ndege TZ	Animator	24	F	Bachelors (Kenya)
3	Ndege TZ	Accountant/Co-Founder	29	M	Bachelors (TZ)
4	Ndege TZ	HR Manager	26	F	Bachelors (TZ)
5	Ndege TZ	Project Coordinator	33	M	Bachelors (TZ)
6	Ndege TZ	Animator	24	M	Form 4
7	Ndege TZ	Field Coordinator	26	M	Bachelors (Kenya)
8	Ndege TZ	Producer/Director	29	M	Bachelors (TZ)
9	Ndege TZ	Field Coordinator	26	M	Bachelors (TZ)
10	Ndege TZ	Research Consultant	29	M	Bachelors (TZ)
11	Ndege TZ	Multimedia Coordinator	25	M	Bachelors (TZ)
12	Ndege TZ	Marketing	29	F	Bachelors (TZ)
13	Ndege TZ	Animator	25	M	Bachelors (UK)
14	Ndege TZ	Communications	33	F	Masters (UK)

⁴ In the Tanzanian education structure, Ordinary Secondary School, or O-Levels, are Form 1 through Form 4. This is followed by Advanced Secondary School, or A-Levels, for two years, or Form 5 and 6. A national exam must be passed to advance to A-Levels.

#	Organization	Role	Age	Gender	Education Level ⁴
15	Ndege TZ	Accountant	26	M	Bachelors (TZ)
16	Ndege TZ	Director/Co-Founder	31	M	Bachelors (TZ)
17	Ndege TZ	Volunteer	23	F	Masters (TZ)
18	Ndege TZ	Volunteer	24	M	Bachelors (TZ)
19	Ndege TZ	Volunteer	24	M	Bachelors (TZ)
20	Ndege TZ	International Intern	28	F	Masters (Canada)
21	Ndege TZ	International Intern	23	F	Masters (Denmark)
22	Beebo	Sports Manager	29	M	Form 4
23	Beebo	Coach	24	F	Form 2
24	Beebo	Junior Leader	19	F	Some University
25	Beebo	Program Manager	34	F	Bachelors (TZ)
26	Beebo	Director/Co-Founder	39	M	Bachelors (Uganda)
27	Beebo	Coach	21	M	Some University
28	Beebo	Finance Manager	32	M	Form 4
29	Beebo	HR Manager	32	M	Some University
30	Beebo	Volunteer	22	M	Form 4
31	Beebo	Volunteer	24	M	Form 6
32	Other	Founder	27	F	
33	Other	Country Coordinator	27	M	
34	Other	Volunteer	26	M	

Data from the interviews were analyzed using inductive grounded theory, a commonly accepted qualitative research analysis technique that uses microanalysis to identify themes or patterns in the data (Bernard 2011; Corbin & Strauss 2008). Data from the interviews illustrates real-life experiences of the contemporary phenomenon discussed in this paper, and generalizability can only be argued as a possibility (Yin 2009; Smith 2018). Future research could improve confidence in generalizability by expanding the research to more youth-led organizations in Dar es Salaam.

Motivational Differences for Volunteering Based on Class Differences

In this section, two interviewee's stories are shared as representative examples of the motivational differences identified from the thirty-four key informant interviews. In the first example, we meet Farida, a volunteer at Ndege Tanzania, whose motivation for volunteering is to gain experience in order to obtain formal employment. The second example introduces Neema, a volunteer at Beebo, who represents the stories of Tanzanian youth who utilize volunteering as an alternative to formal employment. The emerging themes present apparent differences in motivation for volunteering that align with class and educational level differences among the young people interviewed.

For this research, differential access to education is understood as perpetuating social stratification and leading to class differentiations, and education level is used as a proxy for class in practice with other interdisciplinary scholars (Samoff 1979). Access to education informs how youth will navigate their experiences of unemployment. DeJaeghere (2017, p. 6) writes,

Those with only a primary school education are disadvantaged when it comes to formal employment, and most end up working in the informal sector or in informal employment in the formal sector, i.e., jobs without social security benefits, paid leave or sick leave entitlements. At the same time, those who have secondary or tertiary levels of education also experience unemployment, or a longer wait for a good job in the formal sector, due to a lack of skilled jobs in the labor market or their desire for better pay.

Upper- and middle-class youth with university educations are turning to volunteering amid limited employment opportunities. Still, their motivations for and expected outcomes of volunteering are quite different from those of their lower-class peers. While only 2.3% of the Tanzanian population has completed university-level education, the rate at which Tanzanians are enrolling in higher education institutions has been rapidly rising. From 2019 to 2020, the gross enrollment of students in tertiary education rose from 3.1 to 7.8% (UNESCO 2022). Increases aside, university is still mainly limited to those with the financial means.

FARIDA: VOLUNTEERING AS A STEPPING-STONE

The most common reason stated by youth volunteers at Ndege Tanzania for participating in volunteer activities was professional experience. Many said they had future goals of working for international organizations or starting their own local organizations. They also frequently mentioned their unemployed status as a reason for volunteering. The explicit expectation was that volunteering would lead to future formal employment.

Farida was one youth using her volunteer position at Ndege as a stepping-stone towards her future. I first met Farida when she came to the Ndege office for an interview for one of three volunteer positions for a new project. During the interview, I was surprised to learn that Farida was working on a master's degree in Public Health and doing an internship at one of the premier hospitals in the city. She had also previously worked as a teacher and had a bachelor's degree in education. I interacted with Farida over the next few months, I often wondered why she was working as a volunteer when she already had such an impressive résumé. From my perspective, she had all the necessary training, knowledge, and skills to be competitive in the formal labor market and financially compensated for her work. Several months into her volunteer gig, I inquired why she had elected to do this volunteer labor for free. Farida explained that she volunteered because she wanted the experience of working 'in the field'. She listed various skills that volunteering would allow her to acquire, including data collection, interviewing, surveying, and data analysis. She explained that these were all skills she learned in her university education. Still, she described that as only theoretical learning, never having had the chance to put those skills into practice. At Ndege, she could assist in data entry and analysis, which would translate into the experience necessary for the medical administration jobs she wanted to apply for. Farida did gain employment after her volunteer experience at Ndege. She told me that her direct experience with research skills greatly benefited her in the competitive job market. She could speak about her hands-on experience with those skills, and she procured a job in the field she wanted.

NEEMA: VOLUNTEERING AS FORMAL LABOR REPLACEMENT

The reality is that most Tanzanian youth do not continue past secondary school and do not obtain university-level degrees. Consequently, they still participate at high rates in voluntary activities but, unlike

their middle-class peers, their future employment prospects are different. In the environment of limited formal job opportunities, they can't compete, so why are they still volunteering if volunteering will not provide them with increased access to formal employment? For these youth, I argue, there is creative manipulation of volunteer positions as an alternative to formal employment.

Neema is a volunteer youth coach at Beebo. She has been coaching since 2016 and is one of only five female coaches. She is 24 years old and has completed only up to Form 2 in school, the approximate equivalent of a middle school education in the United States. She takes her volunteer coaching position seriously, which is reflected in the respect she is given by the children she coaches, her netball teammates, and the organization's leaders. She typically spends about ten hours each day at Beebo. In the late afternoons, she conducts her coaching duties, but during the daytime, when she is not busy with meetings and program planning, she works on a paper-bag-making project. Neema runs this entrepreneurial venture with a few other youth volunteers at Beebo. Using brown paper, glue, and their hands, they fold and glue, fold and glue, fold and glue, making brown paper lunch bags. They make three different-sized bags and sell them in bundles of 1,000 to local shop owners and street-side bakers. The profit they make is split equally among those involved. Beebo allows them to use the office space for construction and storage, but more importantly, Beebo provided the start-up funds for this project. They paid for the initial supplies until the profits were enough to circulate back and cover the material costs. For Neema, this project is just one of numerous things she does to earn an income. Neema relies on the small allowances often provided through her volunteering activities and other benefits from being attached to a volunteer organization. For example, the youth volunteers at Beebo are treated to a meal for lunch each day and provided with small transportation allowances.

Discussion: Motivations and Waithood

In my fieldwork, I found Tanzanian youth from various socioeconomic situations taking part in practices of voluntary labor. As [Brown and Green \(2015, p. 78\)](#) state, 'What we see in volunteering practices in East Africa are new processes of self-formation which respond to the changing material architectures of labor opportunities.' While there is a common shared experience between classes of the lack of employment opportunities, within the processes of self-formation, we see how class and education level impact on how an individual uses volunteer opportunities to navigate unemployment. [Prince and Brown \(2016, p. 18\)](#) describe volunteering 'as a kind of work...that renders possible new kinds of relationships to paid labour'. Still, these relationships to labor will vary depending on the desired outcome from the voluntary experience.

Farida and Neema's stories are not anomalies. I met many Tanzanian youth with college degrees and past work experience throughout my research. However, while these youth have the necessary credentials via their university degrees, no jobs are available without further demonstrating skills obtained post-university. Youth volunteers repeatedly said employers wanted to see them have experience beyond their university education. Rather than questioning why the university degree was insufficient to signify experience or why their university educations did not provide the necessary experiences, youth interviewees indicated they have accepted that the standard process is to obtain a degree, get experience through volunteering, and then acquire a job. For example, Michael, a staff accountant at Ndege, said,

I think it is good if you volunteer first `cause you get the experience, `cause what [accountants] get at the university is just like a preparation of accounts, but there are certain procedures we are not taught; these are procedures you have to learn in an organization, yeah, like [accountants] prepare something called payment vouchers, but these payment vouchers are not taught in the university, it is something I learned after working.

Michael is 26 years old and has a bachelor's degree in accounting from the University of Dar es Salaam. He obtained his job at Ndege after completing two volunteer positions, one for a government agency and one for an NGO. When volunteering at the NGO, a staff accountant showed him how to do many of the tasks that he knew about from university but had never had the experience of practicing. Regarding voluntary labor in Kenya and Tanzania, scholars say volunteers often compete for the opportunity to attend training programs to increase their employable skills, highlighting how 'people continue to seek education to position themselves favorably in a changing labor market, and volunteer positions are one source of education and training for future employment in the NGO sector' ([Brown & Green 2015](#), p. 77). Like Farida and Michael, university-educated youth are strategically selecting volunteer opportunities that will complement and build upon their previous education and work experiences to build skills to advance their future careers.

Additionally, youth rationalized employers requiring this type of post-university experience. Peter, another volunteer at Ndege, said, 'Yeah, mostly [employers] want people with experience, so I think this is because they want—they do not want to waste time to start teaching and training, so they want someone who comes there to be full packets, like already received training and ready to work'. Another volunteer, Grace, said,

What [employers] want is, they look at your CV, and they see you've done a couple of things that give them confidence that you'll not take them a long time to train you, like that you take your own initiative and be proactive in learning your own basic skills, and volunteering is one of the easier platforms to do that.

However, sometimes volunteering does not lead to formal employment. Youth like Farida and Michael still prosper from volunteering in these situations. Prince, writing about volunteers in Kenya not graduating to formal employment but still benefiting through increased social status, says, 'Success may lie less in the endpoint that is so rarely reached (formal waged employment) than in the ability to cultivate a certain status and project an identity that others have to take seriously' (2015, p. 98). By participating in voluntary positions, often at NGOs, these youth add to the cultural capital their upper-level degrees offer ([Brown & Green 2015](#)). Due to their class positionality that allowed them access to higher education in the first place, accumulating cultural capital allows youth of higher-class positions better chances and opportunities to gain formal employment after their voluntary careers ([Bourdieu 1986](#); [Dalsgaard, Franch, & Scott 2008](#)).

The middle-class, highly educated youth volunteering at Ndege show how volunteering has created opportunities unique to their middle-class and more highly educated identities, whereby they can position themselves as employable community members through their voluntary labor. The acceptance and manipulation of this practice are also seen in their lower-class, less-educated peers' volunteering practices. Still, the motivations and expected outcomes look different, as Neema's story demonstrates.

Neema's volunteering and the volunteer practices of the other youth at Beebo show how socioeconomic class influences youth experiences in multiple ways. First, they demonstrate how the structural inequalities that situate them within socioeconomic positions of poverty reproduce inequality by limiting access to higher education, which in turn limits the employment prospects necessary to move out of poverty. Second, they show how youth in this disadvantaged economic position find new ways to gain cultural, social, and economic capital to create futures for themselves ([Brown & Green 2015](#)). Third, their stories and experiences provide a different lens through which we can examine what it means for Tanzanian youth to achieve access to adulthood and advance a new definition of labor and employment.

These youth are similar to rural youth, who are also lacking opportunities. Volunteering in rural Tanzania rarely ends in gaining formal employment, yet rural Tanzanians continue to pursue volunteering positions. For example, Brown and Green found that in rural Tanzania, 'most volunteers did not make the transformation to paid labor but instead professionalized their volunteer work to position themselves better to access future volunteering positions' (2015, p. 73). I found the same phenomenon among urban youth

with less education and lower-class identities, who used multiple volunteer opportunities to move into better volunteer positions or to replace formal and informal labor practices. Without the opportunity to attend higher education and coming from lower-class situations, the youth in this community are unable use volunteering as a stepping-stone to something better. Instead, they treat volunteer positions like a career. It provides a stable option that offers higher returns of cultural and social capital, even if the economic capital is less than they would garner from more obvious participation in informal labor, doing jobs such as selling produce or portering goods in the market.

Participation in these voluntary positions becomes the norm, and at the same time, waithood is rapidly becoming the norm for African youth. Honwana states that ‘being young in Africa today is synonymous with living in involuntary waithood’. She argues that waithood is slowly supplanting conventional adulthood (2012, p. 6). The ability to pass beyond the social categorization of youth into adulthood has become challenging to achieve ([Cole & Durham 2008](#)).

Conclusion

The examples presented here show Tanzanian youth navigating and understanding voluntary labor as existing within an ambiguous space between paid and unpaid work. Prince and Brown write,

For many people in the global South, and for the growing body of the unemployed in the global North, volunteering is more an economic, livelihood strategy, a way of inserting oneself into networks of patronage, gaining experience, positioning oneself as qualified, and thus as employable, than a gift of free labour (2016, p. 12).

The manipulations and motivations in this space of ‘in-between labor’ create a market for volunteering and volunteer positions as youth navigate their own in-between identities by embracing this period of their lives, reminiscent of Honwana’s ‘waithood’. As in a physical market, where goods are bought, sold, and exchanged, impacting and affecting both the buyer and seller, the concept of ‘market volunteering’ eliminates the focus on altruism as the primary motivation for voluntary labor and recognizes that people participate in voluntary activities for personal gain as well ([Parker 1997](#)).

For youth with higher education levels or higher-class status, like Farida, volunteering is a path out of the youthfulness of waithood, bridging educational experiences and future employment. They turn to volunteer positions to occupy their time while building cultural capital and gaining skills, effectively using these experiences as stepping-stones to future employment.

For youths like Neema, who do not have the higher educational or class status of youths like Farida, volunteering is still a path out of waithood, but it becomes an actual replacement for traditional economic labor activities, whether formal or informal. Volunteering for these youth becomes their career.

For both groups of youth, the current reality is that economic capital and formal employment are exceedingly difficult to obtain, and ‘volunteering can increasingly be understood as a non-negotiable necessity in young people’s lives, as they increasingly have to make allowances for the uncertainty of their choices and futures’ ([Dean 2014](#)). The actual measure of success, if these volunteer opportunities result in the desired outcomes, becomes less important than the recognition that youth in Dar es Salaam are creating new ways to access opportunities and, in some ways, reinventing what it looks like to navigate the period between youthhood and adulthood. Brown and Green write, ‘Professionalized volunteering becomes a means through which educated East African youth and members of the rural, professional, middle-classes fashion themselves as good citizens and as self-directed agents of community transformation’ (2015, p. 64).

Youth have been described as ‘people in the process of becoming rather than being’ ([Honwana & de Boeck 2005](#), p. 34). In Dar es Salaam, the youth volunteering at Ndege and Beebo demonstrate the creative agency that youth are engaging in to navigate their current circumstances. Lack of access to formal

employment has encouraged Tanzanian youth to develop alternative livelihood practices. The youth in this research represent the growing nature of young people's agency to challenge youth identity as liminal and unproductive.

Youth are both influenced by the world they exist in and capable of influencing it, as anthropologist [Deborah Durham \(2004\)](#) argues in her work on youth as 'social shifters'. This recognizes the fluidity of youth and youthhood, or 'youth as lived,' as [Christiansen, Utas, & Vigh call it \(2006, p. 13\)](#). Applying the theory of waithood to these youth's experiences shows how they are manipulating this moment in time, where employment is scarce, to seek out creative ways to continue to navigate their lives by using civil society ([Barford, Coombe, & Proefke 2021](#)).

Current literature on youth volunteering calls for an increased acknowledgment of the various motivations for young people to engage in voluntary work to benefit policy decisions ([Shaw & Dolan 2022](#)). This work explicitly addresses youth volunteering in Dar es Salaam, using ethnographic examples to make two arguments: (1) motivations for volunteering are different for youth of different class identities, and (2) volunteering is a creative solution for youth to navigate their current positions in waithood. For young Tanzanians, civil society organizations and policies relating to youth and unemployment could potentially incorporate these ideas by capitalizing on young people's needs ([Meemaduma & Booso 2022](#)). Using the lessons demonstrated by Ndege Tanzania and Beebo of offering benefits beyond economic or altruistic motivations could increase and support youth volunteering in Tanzania, potentially helping to fill the gaps left by rising unemployment rates.

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