Building a life as a beneficiary of philanthrocapitalism

Value chains and value transformation in rural Tanzania

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Abstract: Tracing processes in which "philanthrocapitalism" generates benefits enables exploration of value-making through hierarchical global relations. Peripheral vision based on fieldwork in Rungwe District shows putative beneficiaries' ways of valuing support exceed donors' intentions. The philanthropic intervention model is organized around the concept of a chain of value addition by and for farmers. This is represented by increased income, which remains elusive. Drawing on the work of Nancy Munn, David Graeber, and Elizabeth Ferry, this article explores transformations (in how value is conceived and pursued) through which rural Tanzanians negotiate political-economic constraints. They prioritize cultivating relations with those who have resources rather than following their instructions to maximize milk production. This is a different value chain approach through which people try to build a life.

Keywords: charity, Gates Foundation, global development, philanthropy, Tanzania, value chains, wealth in people

"Bill Gates is rich, but he needs people here to help cattle keepers," said Samia, a Tanzanian woman in her mid-twenties, to nodding approval. She stood in a circle of one hundred excited young men and women who filled the second smartest function hall in Tukuyu town in Rungwe District, southwest Tanzania. After making her suggestion, she turned to her neighbor and lit his candle from her own. He added to cheers: "He cannot do it alone."

I had joined this group for a two-week training course before they started jobs on a dairy development project funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.[1] For most, this was their first formal employment, which they planned to combine with farming by hand, as their parents did. Unlike older generations, few owned any land. Instead, they borrowed from their elders while waiting for small inheritances that would be split among several siblings. Whether because of fast-diminishing land holdings, climate change, or downward fluctuations in the price of cash crops, attendees told me this was a rare opportunity to "build a life" (*kujenga maisha*)[2]. Some had experimented with microenterprises or received training from other short-lived development initiatives in the area. Only one or two maintained any reliable income from other

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sources. Avenues for formal employment were limited in Rungwe. Job prospects elsewhere in Tanzania were uncertain. Most required connections and qualifications that these trainees did not have. All had completed primary and some secondary schooling, but only a handful had any tertiary education. Their parents were smallholder farmers. A few had a trade or small shop to supplement income from banana cultivation and the sale of milk. The most successful had around five acres of land.

I was surprised by how frequently Bill Gates was referred to during a fortnight of training focused on what trainees would be doing for others rather than the source of funding for the project. Neither he nor any foundation staff was physically present. Trainees mentioned him often, and unprompted. In the exercise of sharing the light of a candle from person to person, we were asked to reflect on what the action meant. Many, including me, thought it symbolized that sharing a light did not dim our own. One young woman reflected: "Bill Gates is an American, but even if people are distant, he helps them." Others referred to his wealth and his leadership. No one mentioned his history in business, Melinda French Gates, or their foundation. Bill Gates was also name-checked, less frequently, by the trainers. They were graduates of universities in Dar es Salaam, Morogoro, and Dodoma. They invoked Gates's funding as an endorsement of the project ("even Bill Gates agrees that this is the best approach"). They associated him with Microsoft and technology. These were not links made by trainees. The point of convergence between groups was repeated statements that the project has received support from "the world's richest person." The emphasis on his involvement and riches reflects the personalization of wealth in Tanzania, and of how people aim to access support from it. Wealth (*tajiri*) is personified, a known person with whom some relationship might be possible. People who are conduits to wealthy individuals are significant because they personify some of that wealth themselves through the ability to connect people and help resources circulate. For the young people I joined in Tukuyu, it made Bill Gates an important part of their training and their hope it would help to "build a life."

The Gates Foundation is a powerful private development institution. If it were a country, its annual international spend of $6 billion would place it seventh on the development assistance committee (DAC) list by annual budget, below Canada but above Sweden. Between 2016 and 2019 its annual distributions dwarfed those of the next nineteen largest foundations combined (OECD 2021). Unlike countries whose budgets are overseen by elected officials and appointed civil service experts, and other foundations who typically appoint prominent experts in relevant fields to their trustee boards, the Gates Foundation was (at the time of my fieldwork) controlled by only two people: Bill Gates and Melinda French Gates.[3] They are both, and Bill Gates in particular, regarded as exemplifying philanthrocapitalism, the idea that one can "do well by doing good" and that capitalism itself is inherently philanthropic. The foundation's market-based ideology does not radically break from international development practice that anthropologists have critically deconstructed for over thirty years. But vigorous endorsement of specific features of contemporary capitalism (including intellectual property rights, distributed production relations, and economic models built on network effects) that have contributed to the fortunes of its founders marks an important shift from development discourses framed around "foreign aid" (Mawdsley 2018). Furthermore, the foundation incentivizes others to adopt favored approaches by directly funding development agencies to adopt specific strategies and guaranteeing a profit to commercial organizations if they undertake approved development activities (Kumar and Brooks 2021; McGoey et al. 2018). BMGF is emblematic of and actively promotes growing faith in private actors over taxpayer-funded government aid initiatives as a force for social and environmental good across the world.

One anthropological contribution to research about globalization is studying its processes through "peripheral vision" that affords ethnographers access to insights that are obscure at the assumed center (Nash 2001). They help to look behind the "hegemonic curtains" of economic models (Shore and Trnka 2015). In this way, anthropologists analyzing philanthropically funded development have upset dearly held principles of its instigators: challenging assumptions about "sustainability" (Scherz 2014) and "free money" (Schmidt 2022). The people sometimes styled as victims of globalization evaluate its benefits and limitations in diverse ways (Bize 2020). Some refuse aid and its premises (O'Sullivan 2023). This is a vital corrective to pathologization of dependent recipients. But does it uphold a binary between passivity and resistance that is less successful in accounting for those who neither refuse nor acquiesce? There has been less attention to how putative beneficiaries of development projects pursue their own visions for a better life in ways that can exceed the designs of their would-be benefactors (Green 2019). People seek out credit, accrue debts, and enable saving through economic relations (Shipton 2007) in which supposed beneficiaries recognize and try to realize different forms of value and wealth. Here wealth does not simply connote accumulated value. Because it is multifaceted and relational, wealth can be negatively viewed if not managed ethically (Rakopoulos and Rio 2018). It incorporates diverse considerations of value that include but cannot be reduced to monetary income (from farming or employment of the type I witnessed training for in Tukuyu). Assets such as land and livestock are often particularly valued (Brockington and Noe 2021). Relations can be another form of asset. Some make demands on those who claim to be, or they think could be, their benefactors (Eyre 2023; Ferguson 2013; Scherz 2014). Others are more cautious of interdependent relationships (Neumark 2017). Such diverse perspectives call for analysis of conceiving, creating, and capturing value through globalized relations: one that is alive to the critical agency of people who are often represented as passive victims (or beneficiaries) of global processes without being blind to structural constraints they face.

My approach draws on anthropological analyses inspired by Nancy Munn's (1986) exploration of value through attention to material-symbolic transformations. Drawing on her work, David Graeber (2001) suggests that value is not what can be appropriated from others but the meaning that people give their own activities. With relevance to questions raised by philanthrocapitalism, others have followed Munn by exploring transformative actions (including production, exchange, and consumption) through which new meaning *and* material change is brought about when different political, economic, and social worlds meet. A key question is how different conceptualizations of value impinge on one another (Foster 2008: 13–14; Graeber 2001: 88). Exploring it, Brad Weiss (1996: 8–9) rejects teleological theories of historical transformation that focus on the economic forces of markets, instead arguing that close attention to the commentaries of people whose actions realize change is required to understand it. Beyond simply juxtaposing differing systems of value, ethnography can trace (political) processes in which some of the meaningful differences through which people understand value come to matter more than others (Ferry 2019: 9–10). Elizabeth Ferry's (2013) study of mineral collecting in North America shows how actions that transform stones into minerals enable them to be viewed as "pristine" and untouched by social laws by those who collect them in the United States of America while simultaneously being instruments and indices of social relations for miners in Mexico, including cooperative membership and small gendered gifts of friendship. Ethnography helps reveal how differing systems of value somehow interrelate within multifaceted hierarchies.

This article focuses on philanthropically funded dairy development initiatives in southwest Tanzania. After introducing my methods and field site, I describe a key strategy around which the Gates Foundation shapes its agricultural development interventions: the "value chain." I then describe how this value chain approach unfolded in my field site in Rungwe. Rather than simply contrasting opposing systems of value, I investigate how they coexist. This informs a discussion of claim-making and heterogeneity in conceptualization and pursuit of value.

Dairying in Rungwe

This article is based on seventeen months of participant observation in a village I call Sukulu in Rungwe District, southwest Tanzania. I lived with intended beneficiaries of dairy development programs and spent hundreds of hours in training organized for them. I conducted a survey of 20 percent of the fourteen hundred households in the village. However, I did not merely "study down while projecting up" (Gilbert and Sklair 2018) through ethnography based on participant observation with "the poor" combined with recourse to publicity or policy statements of more powerful actors. I spent two hundred hours shadowing staff employed by NGOs implementing dairy development projects and conducted twenty-five hours of interviews with ten staff members after encountering some of them in Sukulu and visiting their offices to provide information about my research. I also met staff from the Gates Foundation at my field site, during the single "project visit" they made during my fieldwork. I then followed up by sharing interim findings for their review, and conducted repeated semi-structured interviews. This article draws on these multiple perspectives through prolonged fieldwork in the place they all think their relations should create benefit: Rungwe.

The Nyakyusa people of the area are known in anthropology as agro-pastoralists (Wilson 1951). However, cattle-keeping practices in Rungwe have transformed over the last 40 years, from herding "local" Zebu cows (*ng'ombe wa kienyieji*) to stall feeding cross-bred dairy cattle, known as modern cows (*ng'ombe wa kisasa*), introduced through various development programs (Eyre 2023). Local cows rarely produce more than two liters daily whereas modern cows in Sukulu averaged seven and a half liters of milk per day. However, modern cows are more vulnerable to disease. For this reason, they must be kept in cattle sheds and stall fed, unlike local cows that can be left to pasture. Despite the added burden, modern cows were appreciated for multiple reasons.

The primary one was the manure that cows produce (for use on crops). This response was given by 89 percent of the population in my survey, and it was consistently the first response given. Furthermore, this was particularly associated with modern cows, which are bigger (and therefore produce more) and are kept in one place, therefore conducive to its storage. Beyond this, respondents almost always specified that cow manure made excellent organic fertilizer for banana plants, which are a key crop for sale and consumption and a source of prestige thanks to the symbolic significance of banana for the Nyakyusa (Wilson 1954). Cows that provided lots of manure helped men show their skill as banana farmers. As Graeber (2001) suggests, what people valued about cows was not what could be economically appropriated but how they contributed to meaningful activities.

Manure was not the only benefit of cattle: 71 percent of survey respondents described milk as a benefit of cows, with 22 percent specifying milk for drinking, 6 percent milk for sale. Milk for consumption was considered to contribute to a predominant goal of larger body sizes, both for adults and children, as Andrea Wiley (2014: 155) has shown within India. However, raw milk was not considered "cooked," or ready for consumption, as she found. If drunk with tea it would require the addition of considerable amounts of sugar, as well as boiling. The only other way milk was consumed was soured (*mtindi*). In fact, the generic Nyakyusa word for milk (*lukama*) means soured milk, and fresh milk (*rupio*) would need to be specified. The majority of cattle owners (57 percent) milked their cows, but only 69 percent of those milking their cows sold any, with others prioritizing feeding their family directly. However, unlike for other renowned cattle keepers, including Tanzanian Masai, milk was never the most important food (Århem 1989; cf. Wiley 2014: 93). Nor was it the main source of cash income. Sales volume ranged from 1.25 to 50 liters, with an average of 8.7 liters sold at 600 Tanzanian shillings (20 pence) per liter. This generated a daily income of 5,360 Tanzanian shillings (1.80 pounds) when milking cows, which lasted on average around nine months before productivity fell. This made the average annual income from the sale of milk less than bananas, which equated to 28 branches monthly at a mean price of 5,000 TSH (1.39 pounds)[4], generating an annual income of 1.8 million TSH (500 pounds). What milk and banana offered in common was a small, regular income for ongoing costs (school, soap, salt), unlike potentially more lucrative crops with annual harvests. Each could be consumed as well as sold, giving them an important advantage over cash crops that had long proved unreliable (Eyre 2023). Milk, like banana, fitted within a multiplicity of livelihood strategies in which several latent benefits might coexist.

The dairy value chain

The Gates Foundation's agricultural development funding focuses on maximizing productivity. Their policies advocate markets as the mechanism to maximize benefits from farming. However, their framing of the problem of global poverty as exclusion from capitalist relations also acknowledges that "the losers include many of those who have participated actively in the process of global integration" (Kaplinsky and Morris 2001: 1). This is achieved through taking a "value chain" approach. Bill Gates himself described the value chain as a "principle" for the foundation that "guides our entire strategy" (Gates 2009). Elsewhere he added: "We believe that is the only way to get long-term, sustainable results." But what *are* value chains, and what do they *do*? A review of the literature is beyond this article, but they connote "value adding activities" (Gereffi 2018) that transform something in stages from "raw material" to finished product or service. Different phases of production add value as measured by what a consumer will pay to obtain it. As such, those who can add more, gain more from value chains. Global value chain (GVC) analysis is one of the most influential frameworks. It has a primary focus on "governance" (how control is maintained by "lead firms") and upgrading (how other companies derive benefits) (Bair 2009). Analysis focuses on corporate entities as agents in value chains rather than communities or individuals (Baglioni and Campling 2017). Of course, value chains have consequences for people, particularly due to flexibility demanded of workers, and power wielded by "lead firms" (Dolan 2004). Documenting this has been a contribution of anthropologists within debates across several disciplines. I expand on this approach by analyzing this emic concept for the Gates Foundation based on ethnographic attention to how it unfolds in Sukulu.

The East Africa Dairy Development (EADD) project was an eleven-year program operating in four countries led by the international nongovernment organization (INGO) Heifer Project International (HPI). Phase 2 (2012–2019) saw its expansion to Tanzania. It aimed to double farmers' incomes and create self-sustaining dairy businesses. EADD provided inputs to farmers through hubs that collected milk from them to deliver to urban centers for processing before sale. The Gates Foundation funded the first phase in its entirety and provided 62 percent of the second phase funding. In Tanzania, this amounted to approximately $10 million over six years.

EADD Tanzania was headquartered in Mbeya, the capital of the region of the same name, in which Rungwe is located. Although Rungwe was the main target area due to the number of dairy farmers, it was sixty kilometers away, and EADD had little presence in target communities until 2017, around the time I began fieldwork. At this time, Heifer opened an office in Rungwe and worked with the District Cooperative Office to start new dairy cooperatives. Within Sanga, the ward in which Sukulu lay, the District Cooperative Office organized meetings with residents who might be interested in joining a cooperative. They focused on preexisting cattle groups. Their leaders tended to be men. The new cooperative centered on a dairy development group begun many years earlier by Heifer and the Moravian Church. CHAWA (*Chama cha Wafugaji*, or "group for pastoralists") was officially established in early 2018. Directed and paid for by Heifer, CHAWA hired six community facilitators, three community agrovet entrepreneurs, and a business manager from June 2018.

For several months, community facilitators started farmer groups that provided training on feeding to maximize milk production and the construction of cattle sheds to minimize disease. These loosely followed templates provided by Heifer. They also talked about upcoming benefits of the project. The clearest example of this was a suggestion that the price paid to farmers for milk would increase, by between 33 and 100 percent, from 600 TSH (16 pence) to 800 TSH (22 pence) or up to 1,200 TSH (33 pence) per liter. They also discussed different inputs and advanced technologies that EADD would provide, such as a threshing machine to make hay from the waste produce of the maize harvest. Community facilitators were incentivized to maximize the number of groups they started, and the number of people in them. This led to high proportion of members who had no cows. Some joined because they hoped the groups might offer cows. Some wanted to find out more about the potential profit in cattle keeping, and others attended because these groups overlapped with existing activities, such as selling their tea harvest. Several offered welcome social occasions with their friends, family, and neighbors. As Graeber (2001: 68) suggests, people did not seem to prioritize narrowly defined "economic activities." They could attend for free. It involved no commitment to EADD or engagement with the dairy value chain. Many groups functioned primarily as village savings and loans associations (*vikoba*), which themselves rely on social relations (Green 2019; Shipton 2007). However, it cost 10,000 TSH (2.78 pounds) to join CHAWA. It was months before a single member of any EADD group in Sukulu joined, and fewer than 6 percent of group members ever did.

While the groups grew, Heifer staff secured equipment for twelve milk-chilling facilities, located across Rungwe and owned by cooperatives. Heifer also created an intermediary layer between itself and the cooperatives it had established, such as CHAWA, because of concerns about their "organizational capacity." Milk Union (MU) comprised board members of the assorted cooperatives, selected by Heifer for their business aptitude and respect in their communities. Most had connections to other development initiatives or government officials outside their villages. Once MU was established as a legal entity, it took on employment of CHAWA's and other cooperatives' staff and management of the chilling facilities still under construction. Each hub contained a milk-chilling tank with two to five thousand liters capacity, depending on the anticipated volume of milk in the area. Heifer brokered a deal with a small processor, Ungano, based several hours away. Ungano was founded by an international NGO, which funded the construction of its milk-processing facility. They established a cooperative and brokered limited marketing opportunities in Dar es Salaam before transferring ownership to Ungano. Ungano sold processed milk to EADD, branded with "EADD" and "Heifer International" logos as well as "*maziwa shuleni*" (school milk) for the project's school milk feeding program. This gave Heifer considerable leverage over Ungano. Heifer also negotiated with major milk processors from Dar es Salaam, Tanga, and Iringa. This included the main existing buyer, which I call Booths Dairies. Booths was the only national processor with chilling facilities in Rungwe. Heifer initially saw them as a potential partner. However, Booths already sourced milk directly from farmers, and relations were strained by Heifer's approach within EADD. Informed by value chain analysis, EADD leaders encouraged other processors to source milk in Rungwe and organized farmers collectively through a single corporate entity, MU, authorized to negotiate on their behalf. The managing director of Booths Dairies was critical of this approach, even NGO involvement in the sector at all. He suggested that farmers should focus on increasing milk production and not the amount they were paid for each liter. In this he unknowingly echoed Gates Foundation staff in their preeminent focus on milk production throughout presentations and discussions.

Several months after MU's formation, the cooperative began selling milk from Sanga to Ungano, in October 2018. Heifer provided funds to hire four motorcycle taxis (*pikipiki*) to collect milk from outlying areas at no direct cost to farmers, using milk canisters strapped to their bikes, with two workers at the chilling facility where farmers could bring milk directly. CHAWA collected less than 100 liters on the first day but within three weeks increased to 1,000 liters daily. In response, Booths increased the amount they paid per liter by 8.3 percent, from 600 TSH to 650 TSH (16 pence to almost 18 pence). Ungano, the EADD partner, continued to pay 600 TSH, which had been the accepted price of milk for several years. Despite the lower price, EADD milk collection continued to increase. This was driven by criticism of Booths. At one point, Booths told farmers that the milk they had accepted and collected the previous day had spoiled, and therefore no one would be paid. Many shifted to EADD, who promised to pay all whose milk they accepted and who tested it at the point of delivery. I asked one friend if he had calculated the difference between the money he lost from Booths that one day and what he gained because of the higher prices they paid. He told me this was unimportant because Booths were exploitative (*unyonyaji*). Describing Booths as *mnyonyaji* (a parasite) was a classic socialist idiom (Brennan 2006) often associated in Tanzania with critique of outsiders (Degani 2022: 15). The owner of Booths was also sometimes described in racialized terms, as Arabic. This suggests that he was considered alien in some way, and it is important not to ignore problematic racial politics in Tanzania. However, farmers noted EADD, HPI, and Gates were also led by outsiders. This included *wazungu* (white people) in the case of Gates and HPI, and an *mhindi* (Indian) in the case of EADD. None of these were considered parasitic, although they offered lower prices for milk, because EADD were somehow deemed "fair" (*haki*). Fairness here did not simply connote uniform prices (as dysfunctional parastatals had offered in the socialist era) but ensuring the flow of funds to farmers followed the flow of milk from them. The shift in loyalty occurred because people felt that EADD fulfilled its obligations to them better than Booths, rather than because of a reductive calculation about economic appropriation in the short term.

Despite this, EADD experienced problems within its first year of operation. Ungano delayed payments to MU, due to financial difficulties. After waiting for several weeks, many farmers returned to Booths. Managers at Heifer refused to bail out Ungano following what they perceived as its organizational failures because they said EADD worked by instilling "market rationale." They reasoned that MU should be able to handle ordinary problems of delayed payments, and any bailout would create expectation of "handouts" that would doom the project. For the same reasons, they did not provide MU with working capital despite instructing its leaders that finding some should be a priority. The organization never had the cash flow required to develop any. Problems were exacerbated by outbreaks of mastitis. Despite several attempts, EADD was unable to broker the entry of another milk processor into Rungwe. Soon after Heifer's direct involvement, and my fieldwork, ceased, MU stopped operating in Sukulu as a functional cooperative brokering between farmers and processors. Booths Dairies took on the milk-chilling facilities. It pays rent to the district government and only operates those from which it can profitably collect milk.

Knowledge, mindset, profit

In tandem with their organizational activities, EADD made "knowledge transfer," as they called it, a priority. In total, EADD employed 90 such individuals across the district. I attended weekly sessions of four EADD groups in Sukulu between May 2018 and April 2019, recording their purpose and content from September 2018 (when numbers increased considerably). Of 64 meetings that went ahead, out of a potential 112, only 32 had any form of training session from a CHAWA employee. The main topics were appropriate feed and housing for cattle. When providing training, trainers followed templates from their two-week residential course mentioned above. They used printed material provided by Heifer as guides, although some of this was written in English, which few could read. Their knowledge was limited, and group members often impugned it to me. One farmer warned me privately that a community facilitator was a "liar" (*mwongo*) because of promises he made about the project and claims about his own expertise. Another suggested the same young man knew nothing about cattle, after a session that explained benefits EADD would bring farmers. Graeber (2001: 80) has noted the importance of creative, caring, and relational work that goes into labor power but is invisible within "workplaces." EADD neglected these important relations between people in Sukulu and its community facilitators. They really were embedded, and beneficiaries themselves, but as such might be impugned by people with first-hand knowledge of their drinking, unreliability, or their own cattle keeping. A few were trusted, on the other hand, purely because of respect afforded to a father or uncle.

When delivering training, community facilitators often repeatedly returned to preferred topics. Sometimes this was exacerbated by visits from guests. These included local government district livestock officers, who knew more than CHAWA staff about caring for cattle, and Heifer staff including senior international visitors. Due to their prestige, visitors were never challenged. For example, many farmers could describe the ingredients and even proportions of recommended animal feed supplements before they had been trained. The vast majority knew how to build a good cattle shed (*banda bora*) to minimize mastitis and other diseases. However, in a village of fourteen hundred households, almost a quarter of which I visited, I only ever saw two cattle sheds built to anything approaching this design. During my first weeks in Sukulu, I visited one man reputed to be a cattle expert. He had built a simple shed without the features of the *banda bora* for his six cows. When I asked him whether he knew about how to build a good cattle shed, he drew a detailed plan of a Heifer-approved design and explained the advantages of using durable "modern" materials such as concrete (Brownell 2020: 80) but told me that he did not have the funds to build one.

I reflected on this with Akili, a junior Heifer staff member responsible for overseeing CHAWA. Although she spent considerable time monitoring training for "knowledge transfer," Akili was clear that farmers already had a lot of the knowledge taught. When I asked her why so few built a *banda bora* then, she told me that it was due to their mindset (*fikra*): "Building a good cattle shed just isn't their priority (*kipaumbele*). They do have the money. But they just choose to build a bigger house with it instead. It's short-sighted." The explanation of mindset seemed to acknowledge that training provided by EADD was not simply about knowledge but also about persuading people to adopt different goals. Such an endeavor is fraught because of profound connections between personhood and how value is conceptualized (Foster 2008). Ideas about "what really matters" are also made through political processes (Ferry 2019). Akili's discussion of mindset was an important part of these. Her ideas about "deservingness" and appropriate priorities obscured hierarchical relations and class advantages she enjoyed over "beneficiaries" (Green 2021). For international staff at BMGF and Heifer, she nevertheless seemed similar because she was from rural Tanzania. But she was university educated, normally lived in a city, and had significantly better-paid (formal) employment than anyone in Sukulu. Akili was also incentivized to explain deviation from expected results without challenging the conceptual premises of EADD. Echoing and updating longstanding blame attached to poor people for their poverty due to "cultural factors" (Apthorpe 1970: 2), Akili's answer was that people valued the wrong thing.

Indeed, incompatible ideas of value seemed to operate simultaneously within the project (cf. Shipton 2007). Discussing limited take-up of EADD recommendations with Akili's senior colleagues at Heifer, as well as BMGF, I noted that the English word "profit" was normally translated in Swahili as *faida*, which also meant "benefit" more broadly. The financial semantics of profit in English, in which efficiency is central, seemed absent in Swahili. Perhaps this reflected that maximizing "return on investment" was not as universal as those designing and implementing EADD presumed. My elite interlocutors took this as encouragement to "train" farmers about the importance of financial recordkeeping and the rewards so offered. It also provincialized their own ideas about "profit," which were constituted through sociotechnical devices such as accounting protocols (Breton and Caron 2008; Eyre et al. 2024) and frameworks such as the value chain itself (Foster 2008: 13). Exploring alternative ideas about "what really mattered" helped understand limited take-up of improved feed supplements to increase milk production, for example.

CHAWA began to provide cattle feed in July 2018, available on a two-week interest-free loan. On the first occasion, twelve people came to collect feed. Most were milking one cow and several were milking two or more. However, no one took the recommended amount for a lactating cow. After six months, I explored the records produced by CHAWA's food committee. Although the amount sold quadrupled between July and September (from one hundred to four hundred kilograms) it then plateaued. Meanwhile, the average number increased from twelve to twenty before dropping to an average of fourteen. Furthermore, the average loan size increased very slightly, from nine to twelve kilograms. A few people borrowed every month. Some did not borrow one month and then returned the next. None seemed to increase, or use the amounts that were recommended by Heifer. When I asked those who took these loans about their effect on milk, no one who gave a positive response did so with precision. Some said they were waiting to evaluate its effects after several months. Others said it had boosted milk production but could not say by how much. I found to my surprise that one of the most loyal purchasers of the feed mix was not currently milking her cow. She suggested the feed would help it grow.

I discussed this problem with all of my interlocutors. A retired Heifer member of staff and an employee of the Gates Foundation were among the most strident in arguing that this illustrated the short-termism of farmers. They felt that farmers prioritized immediate needs rather than long-term benefits. Another Heifer employee pointed out that most farmers were willing to borrow from savings and loans groups (*vikoba*). I spent the next four months enquiring about all loans made at one EADD group I attended regularly. I found that of twenty loans over this period, six were used to pay toward other loans; four were for home improvements; eight were for short-terms emergencies, including medical care for family; and two were for some form of investment: one to buy fertilizer, another to buy chickens. The most common use of loans was for short-term needs. If outstanding loans are included as short-term needs, they represented 70 percent of the total loans, otherwise 40 percent. Investments aimed at a monetary profit were just 10 percent of the total number of loans. However, this is not straightforwardly a case of short-termism. The largest loans were for home improvements. For example, one man took a loan of 100,000 TSH (27.83 pounds) to buy four large trees with which he hoped to build a house for his son. He planned to begin construction within six months and finish within two years. As has long been widespread in Tanzania, spending money to construct houses seems like a better investment than farming businesses (Green 2014: 53). This was clearly a long-term investment. By total amount, such loans were more than 50 percent. The Gates Foundation employee who diagnosed short-termism as the problem also suggested it revealed farmers' risk discounting, in which they accepted a lower rate of return from their investments in exchange for less risk. For Tanzanian smallholders, promises of increased incomes from investment in farming technologies have long proved unreliable (Green 2014: 53). Forecasting potential returns for farmers I knew that were milking various amounts, I found that EADD's own training suggested a modest financial return for those who obtained ideal results, with over twice as much money risked in the process. Rather than assuming that smallholder risk discounting is connected to short-termism or a deficient mindset, it seems better explained as a critical reflection on outsider promises and prioritization of goals such as a new and improved house (Brockington and Noe 2021) over an uncertain means of making money that might be used to buy one in future.

The absence of profit seeking was not what held back farmers from taking on loans designed to boost productivity. Active members of EADD groups who did not use the food mix told me they thought it would bring no benefit. Two separately provided their own calculations of projected milk increase. Unlike mine, theirs did not show ideal cases but real estimates of potential change. In both cases it was insufficient to pay for the increase in cost. Calculations about profit and risk actually seemed to hinder adoption of Heifer-recommended feeding techniques. I found no evidence of that mindset holding people back from following EADD's training, any more than a lack of knowledge did. Does this mean that no one felt they benefitted from EADD? Answering this requires exploration of the value that people identified in the project, and how they pursued it.

Building a life as a beneficiary

Dena Freeman (2013) suggests that apple value chain development in Ethiopia increases inequality between farmers because capitalizing on its opportunities is only an option for the wealthiest. On the surface, this does not seem true of EADD. Wealthy farmers never bought supplement from CHAWA because they could buy it cheaper in bulk elsewhere. They were among the least loyal to MU and CHAWA in selling milk, and never attended EADD meetings. I was able to understand more about how one wealthy farmer evaluated the opportunities of EADD when he questioned a community facilitator just before CHAWA first began to buy milk. He was uninterested in promises that milk prices would rise in future and only concerned with what the initial price was and especially in who would pay. His questions focused on whether Heifer themselves would be buying milk and paying farmers directly. He was also interested in how they would pay. He wanted payment in cash, not through mobile money, which might incur a fee that could be passed on to him and might limit face-to-face engagement and therefore opportunities to further build a relationship with the person paying him. These questions point to how this farmer evaluated the worth of the project. He was asking about the direct links that EADD might offer to wealthy outsiders, as indexed by their clothes, physiques, and their use of Toyota Land Cruisers. He was uninterested in training about the profitability of milk and focused instead on how he could develop more beneficial relationships. Others sought positions on CHAWA's board, through which they gained: influence in hiring people, travel opportunities, and material goods. The latter included items promoted by the project, as well as travel and attendance allowances that were above average wages (up to 20,000 TSH or 5.56 pounds for a few hours). Despite this, these same CHAWA board members did not buy cattle feed from the cooperative, and in at least one case sold milk to Booths rather than their own organization. They were criticized for this by their neighbors, but Heifer personnel never knew about it.

Among other farmers, those who adopted Heifer recommendations did not do so because they identified an opportunity to capitalize on their place in the dairy industry by increasing milk production or profit. Such thinking did exist among some people in Sukulu, but they engaged minimally with EADD. People who followed EADD recommendations did not adopt a value chain approach to dairying. The farmers who trialed small amounts of the feed were those who did not calculate the profitability of milk production. They did so because of their relationships with people connected to EADD. One explicitly told me she did so out of loyalty to one of CHAWA's leaders. Others were longstanding members of the group from which CHAWA originated or felt ties of loyalty to figures within CHAWA through kinship or because of previous support. Still others sought financial inducements through positions on CHAWA's board and various committees, or formal employment or piecemeal economic opportunities. When Heifer provided CHAWA with the funding to offer new village groups 100,000 TSH (27.83 pounds) each, many groups were established. When opportunities arose on business and gender committees of CHAWA, with an allowance for attendance (*posho*), many wanted to join.[5] They tended to be distributed to older men and offered as a reward for establishing or leading EADD groups.

One friend in his thirties, Gwamaka, told me he would never sell milk to EADD because they often delayed payments and he would get more money from Booths dairies or other sources. However, he quickly offered to help Akili, the Heifer member of staff responsible for EADD in Sukulu, when she procured some land to plant avocado in the village. He took on the difficult yet unpaid role of trying to secure her a supply of manure, as she had no cows, for which he had to plead with numerous neighbors and contacts. I asked him:

"Why do you help for free, doing work without payment?"

"She is a friend."

"But she can afford to pay you. She will make money from selling avocado."

"But loyalty (*uaminifu*) is good because she will remember her friend."

His preference was to have a friend with resources to call on at some point in the future, rather than be paid immediately or at a fixed rate. The task was also worth it for a young, ambitious, and intelligent man because he was able to demonstrate his connection to a relatively wealthy outsider to others. As Keith Hart (1988: 188–190) noted at a time of economic tumult among Frafra migrants in Accra during the 1960s, friendship is an important idiom for relationship making in the face of changing contexts and connections that stretch beyond established horizons. However, it would be too much of a stretch to represent Gwamaka's gregariousness as cynically instrumental (Shipton 2007: 27): friendship brought benefits, but it was good in itself.

Such multifaceted relations recall theories of "wealth-in-people." While "big men" (in particular) aim to do things with, for, and through other people through rights in their labor, loyalty, property, or reproductive capacity (Kusimba 2021: 51–52), some aim for dependence on others as a deliberate strategy. Comparing Gwamaka's, and others', loyalty to EADD and people connected to the project builds understanding of the ongoing relevance of wealth-in-people in the face of a globalized economy from the perspective of those seeking dependency (Ferguson 2013) and the increasing challenges of adopting such a strategy (Eyre 2023; Scherz 2014). Many did invest in relationships (Berry 1989). But there were important divergences within Sukulu. They were based on different evaluations of the potential rewards of such relations. Not everyone prioritized connections to powerful outsiders. Wealthier and more educated cattle owners in particular seemed able to choose between different modes of economic relations with outsiders. "Beneficiaries" were not uniformly pursuing dependence as a "mode of action" but did generally evaluate the potential efficacy of this strategy, and the value of different relationships themselves.

Conclusion

This article has offered an anthropological critique of value chains by analyzing an ethnographic case study of Gates Foundation–funded dairy development in Rungwe District, Tanzania. It explored the value chain (an emic concept for BMGF) through "peripheral vision" that embraced the diverse perspectives of different actors linked by philanthropic relations. From the perspective of farmers, opportunities to benefit from EADD did not come from training about how to increase income by producing more milk, or organization in a cooperative to sell milk to a larger processor for more money. Most people in Sukulu saw tangible benefit through relationships with CHAWA, MU, Heifer, and the Gates Foundation. Farmers evaluated EADD and their own role in it through the opportunity to create, capture, and sustain value in the form of relationships with potential benefactors (*wafadhili*). Rather than suggesting that this always manifested through distributive labor or trying to be wealth-in-people, I demonstrated that it took different forms, including "loyalty" variously conceived, critical evaluation of how likely they were to be able to draw on these relationships, and establishing groups or carrying out activities on behalf of the project. This bears resemblance to how coordinated relationships and specialization are meant to work in value chains. But these activities did not lead to maximizing the production of milk, which people were not convinced was a reliable enough source of increased income to spend additional time or energy on. People who engaged with EADD valued relationships with philanthropists (and those connected to them) who could provide material resources, and not the commodity that those same philanthropists thought the value chain was organized around. In this sense, two different value chain approaches (one that valued philanthropic relations, and the other that valued the sale of milk) were in operation simultaneously.

Different actors prioritized what they thought was most valuable about EADD. For example, Gates Foundation materials and staff talking points during a brief visit to Rungwe emphasized milk production as goal, whereas farmers often proactively and comparatively discussed relations. They expressed personal gratitude to BMGF personnel though translators during these brief visits rather than discussing "the results" that program officers were interested in. Paralleling Parker Shipton's (2007) exploration of incompatible but simultaneously occurring "fiduciary cultures," conceptualizations of what really mattered remained mutually obscured even while they enabled one another. This version of value transformation was essential to the communal viability (Graeber 2001: 45; Munn 1986) of philanthrocapitalist relations.

Such ambivalence prompts a return to analytic metaphors for value. Within her analysis of the North American mineral trade, Ferry (2019: 9) rejects the idea of a "chain" that binds passive captives. She prefers a "knottier" image that conveys complexity and contestation. Such a move is productively problematic in my case, where farmers pursue their own visions of value by chaining themselves to philanthropists and their conduits. As Diane-Laure Arjaliès (2017: 15) suggests in her analysis of European asset management, the ambivalent connotations of "chains" matter. The chain anchors and binds, but also supports and connects. Understanding what value chains *do* requires attention to the transformative actions of their poorer and stereotypically peripheral constituents as part of global relationships. This is not in service of optimistic claims by advocates of philanthrocapitalism to be able to "change the world." Instead, it acknowledges that my interlocutors (especially Tanzanian farmers) value philanthropy and development. They want more of it. But they are nonetheless critical evaluators of unproven ideas and not easily persuaded by optimistic promises. They are cautious and creative adapters with nuanced and changing ideas about the potential risk and reward of development programs, and of how to conceive and pursue what they value about philanthropy. Their perspectives and actions challenge assumptions about the passivity of those to whom good (or bad) is done without obfuscating global hierarchies that are a reality of attempts to "build a life."

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Notes

1. In May 2024, Melinda French Gates announced her resignation as co-chair of the foundation effective 7 June 2024. The foundation announced its name would change to the Gates Foundation under sole chair Bill Gates.
2. All italicized words are Swahili unless stated otherwise.
3. Between 2006 and 2021 the only other trustee of the foundation was megadonor Warren Buffett, who avowedly left control to its eponymous founders. In 2022, following his resignation and the divorce of Bill Gates and Melinda French Gates, the foundation appointed additional trustees.
4. All currency conversion made using xe.com on 22/09/2024.
5. With etymological roots in the English word "portion," *posho* here as elsewhere in Tanzania was understood as cash payment for attendance, normally in addition to food.

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