Special Issue: COVID-19 and Philanthropy in Africa.

Introduction to the Special Issue: COVID-19 and Philanthropy in Africa

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The COVID-19 pandemic represents one of the most profound global disruptions of the 21st century. Beyond its devastating health consequences, the pandemic triggered sweeping socioeconomic dislocations that exposed deep structural inequalities across the world. In Africa, the pandemic unfolded within contexts already marked by fragile health systems, high levels of poverty and informality, and limited state capacity to deliver large-scale social protection. While governments across the continent adopted lockdowns, movement restrictions, and public health interventions to curb the spread of the virus, these measures also produced new vulnerabilities, particularly among low-income households dependent on daily earnings. As formal systems struggled to respond rapidly and comprehensively, philanthropy, especially faith-inspired and community-based giving, emerged as a critical mechanism of social support.

This special issue of the *Journal of Muslim Philanthropy & Civil Society* brings together a collection of scholarly reflections that examine the diverse forms, meanings, and impacts of philanthropy during the pandemic across African contexts. The issue grew out of a grant obtained from the Muslim Philanthropy Initiative for a symposium titled "Philanthropy in Africa during COVID-19" held on May 20, 2021, at the University of Jos, Nigeria. The symposium convened scholars from Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, the Netherlands, Germany, and South Africa to reflect on how religious, community, and civil-society actors responded to the unprecedented crisis. The papers in this volume collectively demonstrate that the pandemic did not merely intensify philanthropic activity; it reshaped the meanings, motivations, and modalities of giving in significant ways. The pandemic provides a unique analytical lens through which to examine philanthropy in Africa. Historically, philanthropic practices across the continent have been deeply embedded in religious traditions, kinship networks, and communal systems of reciprocity. Islamic concepts such as *zakāt* and *sadaqat*, Christian traditions of charity and

almsgiving, and indigenous systems of mutual aid have long served as social safety nets. During COVID-19, however, these traditions were mobilized under extraordinary conditions characterized by mobility restrictions, economic contraction, and heightened fear and uncertainty. The crisis, therefore, invites us to rethink philanthropy not simply as voluntary giving, but as a critical component of social resilience and survival.

The contributions in this special issue illuminate how philanthropic practices were redefined in response to the pandemic's pressures. They demonstrate how religious teachings, local leadership, and grassroots networks played pivotal roles in shaping responses that complemented, and sometimes substituted for, state interventions. They also highlight the ways in which philanthropy intersected with security, livelihoods, religious authority, media discourse, and community relations. Taken together, the articles show that philanthropy during COVID-19 was not only about relief but also about meaning-making, social cohesion, and the negotiation of trust between communities and institutions.

The opening article by Dauda Abubakar examines how Muslims and Christians in Northern Nigeria redefined philanthropy during the pandemic. In a region characterized by longstanding economic hardship and security challenges, the lockdown intensified existing vulnerabilities. The paper demonstrates that individuals, faith-based organizations, and NGOs mobilized to support neighbors and vulnerable populations through food distribution and other forms of assistance. Importantly, the article shows how interfaith philanthropic practices fostered solidarity during a time of crisis. Acts of giving transcended religious boundaries, reinforcing shared humanity and collective responsibility. This contribution underscores the role of grassroots generosity and everyday acts of kindness in sustaining communities when formal systems were overstretched.

Murtala Ibrahim's article shifts the focus to the intersection of philanthropy and security. Examining the activities of vigilante groups during the lockdown in Jos, the paper reveals how communities reciprocated the efforts of these groups by providing food and other support. Vigilantes assisted the police in enforcing lockdown measures, highlighting the role of non-state actors in maintaining order during emergencies. The study demonstrates that philanthropy in this context functioned as a form of social exchange and recognition, reinforcing mutual trust between communities and local security actors. By framing charity as a response to public service, the article expands our understanding of philanthropy beyond humanitarian relief to include the maintenance of social order.

The third contribution by Binyamin Lawal Abdulganiy explores the role of Muslim preachers in encouraging giving during the pandemic in Nigeria. Through sermons and religious messaging, preachers invoked Qur'anic verses and prophetic traditions to motivate believers to support those in need. The article highlights how religious authority played a central role in mobilizing charitable behavior, particularly during Ramadan, a period already associated with intensified giving. This study demonstrates how religious discourse

adapted to the pandemic context, framing philanthropy as both a spiritual obligation and a practical response to collective hardship.

Halkano Abdi Wario and Chembea Suleiman Athuman provide a Kenyan perspective by analyzing how Ramadan philanthropy was framed in the *Friday Bulletin*, a weekly magazine published by Nairobi's Jamia Mosque. Their textual analysis reveals how media narratives encouraged acts of charity and highlighted humanitarian initiatives carried out by mosques, Muslim organizations, and businesses. The article shows how religious media functioned as a powerful platform for promoting solidarity and coordinating philanthropic responses. It also illustrates how religious communication shaped public perceptions of charity during the pandemic.

The South African case study by Sokfa Francis John and Dauda Abubakar examines the activities of the Gift of the Givers Foundation through the lens of the sustainable livelihood framework. The analysis demonstrates how the foundation played a vital role in helping communities cope with the pandemic by providing humanitarian assistance and supporting resilience. The authors argue that faith and religious doctrines should be recognized as important transforming structures within sustainable livelihoods' discourse. This contribution broadens the conceptual framework of philanthropy by linking it to development and resilience theory.

The Ghanaian contributions deepen the thematic focus on food, livelihoods, and everyday survival. Rashida Alhassan Adum-Atta's article highlights the centrality of food in Ghana during the pandemic, emphasizing how food security became a key concern in public discourse. Fulera Issaka-Toure examines food sharing in the multiethnic and multireligious neighborhood of Madina Zongo in Accra. Her analysis reveals how food philanthropy shaped social relations and reinforced coexistence during a time of crisis. These studies underscore the importance of food as both a material necessity and a symbolic medium of care, belonging, and solidarity.

Finally, Mustapha Hashim, Gina Lende, and Maikano Madaki's article provides a comprehensive overview of Muslim humanitarian actors in Nigeria during COVID-19. The study examines their motivations, funding sources, beneficiaries, networks, and challenges. It highlights how the pandemic created both obstacles and opportunities for humanitarian activism, revealing the adaptability and resilience of Muslim charitable organizations in the Global South.

Collectively, the contributions in this special issue offer several key insights. First, they demonstrate that philanthropy during COVID-19 was deeply rooted in religious and cultural traditions but also highly adaptive to new challenges. Second, they show that philanthropic practices extended beyond formal organizations to include everyday acts of generosity and mutual aid. Third, they reveal the importance of partnerships between communities, religious institutions, and civil-society actors in responding to crises. Finally, they highlight the need to recognize philanthropy as a vital component of social resilience and development. By documenting these diverse experiences, this special issue contributes to broader conversations about the role of philanthropy

in times of crisis. It invites scholars and practitioners to rethink the boundaries between charity, development, and governance and to consider how faith-inspired giving can inform more inclusive and sustainable approaches to social support. The COVID-19 pandemic may eventually recede, but the lessons it offers about solidarity, generosity, and community resilience will remain relevant for years to come. This volume, therefore, serves not only as a record of philanthropic responses during an unprecedented global crisis but also as a call to continue exploring the transformative potential of African giving in shaping more just and compassionate societies.