

## **The Commodification of Compassion**

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This paper discusses the conceptual framework for a collaborative project which deals with the cultural role of celebrities in the promotion of and involvement in aid to Africa.

The increasing involvement of celebrities in all stages of development aid reflects a trend of re-inscribing development aid in the cultural and political imagery away from a state-driven, technocratic modality to a private, personalised and emotional modality. To foster the personal interconnection in a global community, between Western individual and 'the suffering African', development success becomes a consumer product that can forge an affective bond. As such, celebrities play a key role in personifying the experience of emotional interconnectedness in the practice of marketing development aid.

The paper will discuss the analytical concepts of commodification of compassion and affective discourses of suffering and redemption to cross-fertilize two very different projects: The case of local-global interplay in relation to Madonna's Raising Malawi project; and the cultural role of Danish celebrities in the promotion of aid for a Danish media audience.

We will discuss the affective practices involved in promotion of Danish development aid and focus on the cultural imagery invoked when celebrities 'witness' that aid matters and that 'it works'. Furthermore, we will illustrate how Raising Malawi represents an interlinked development trend: celebrities starting their own private initiatives to save the suffering Africans. Based on these two trends we want to discuss the implications of the commodification of compassion seen in the context of African experiences of development, citizenship and global inequalities.