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Choices on money: entrepreneurship and youth aspirations in Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

This study engages with recent works on entrepreneurship and microfinance in the developing world as it seeks to understand youths' interactions with microfinance initiatives in a specific African context. Using the case of urban Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, I apply the theory of value to question the notion that 'entrepreneurship' can be separated from other aspects of cultural and social lives in the community. By providing business grants and entrepreneurship training, microfinance institutions assume that youth from poor backgrounds will also be able to start their own business, sustain it and succeed financially. However, this relationship is not well established and need to be further explored empirically and ethnographically. Through ethnographic observation of three material sites, namely family, market, and the project that provided a business grant to 52 secondary school graduates, I look at how youth, as potential entrepreneurs in the context of limited access to formal education and employment in urban areas, make choices on the use of money in relation to entrepreneurship investments, daily livelihoods, and future plans.

The general framework that informs youth entrepreneurship programs posits that the lack of capital, skills, business knowledge and poor policy framework explains, to a larger extent, why business ventures are not successful among youth living in poverty. However, this research indicates that family dynamics, youth aspirations, belief systems, and nature of interventions programs are factors that influence youth engagements with entrepreneurship and the outcome of their business ventures.