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## CATEGORIES OF STREET BEGGARS AND FACTORS INFLUENCING STREET BEGGING IN CENTRAL TANZANIA

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**ABSTRACT** This study examined categories of street beggars and factors influencing begging activities in Central Tanzania using Dodoma and Singida Municipalities as case studies. A cross-sectional research design was employed in this study. Structured questionnaires were administered to 130 street beggars, who were selected from various public spaces using a convenience sampling technique. Focus-group discussions, key-informant interviews, and observations were also used to collect primary data. The study found that street beggars fell into four categories namely beggars on the streets, beggars of the streets, beggars in the streets, and beggars of street families, based on where they slept after begging hours and contacts with their families. Furthermore, the phenomenon of street begging is an outcome of many factors, including poverty, unemployment, physical challenges, death of parents, and family disintegration. The study recommends that to address the phenomenon of street begging, policy planners and local government authorities must adopt multi-faceted, multi-targeted, and multi-tiered approaches in the form of preventative and responsive interventions.

**Key Words:** Street beggars; Poverty; Urban problem; Dodoma; Singida; Tanzania.

### INTRODUCTION

The problem of begging is a universal phenomenon; it is not peculiar to any part of the country. It is an urban problem that is noticeable in every urban area of any country. Although the problem of begging is a worldwide phenomenon, it is more pronounced in third-world countries. In many urban areas, street beggars are found everywhere in public spaces, such as filling stations, restaurants, banks, super markets, mosques, churches, etc. Deviant behaviors such as theft, thuggery (violent and criminal behavior), and vandalism are listed as some of the vices associated with street begging (Adedibu & Jelili, 2011; Tambawal, 2010; Adedibu, 1989 cited by Ogunkan & Fawole, 2009). The problem of begging is experienced in almost every urban area in Tanzania, even though it is significantly higher in some parts of the country than in others (Namwata et al., 2010). The phenomenon of street begging is a result of a number of factors, such as poverty (real or imagined), religion, physical disability, culture, national disaster, civil war, bad habits (drug, alcohol, and gambling dependencies), family heritage, uncontrolled rural-urban migration, and psychiatric disabilities and disorders (Amman, 2006; Ogunkan & Fawole, 2009; Namwata et al., 2011).

In trying to address the challenges brought by begging activities, a few local government authorities in Tanzania have undertaken various efforts to tackle the problem, but have not been successful. The problem persists because these authorities have failed to develop strategies that would help street beggars to obtain the basic necessities of life. For instance, in 2008, the Dar es Salaam City Council conducted a program that evacuated beggars from every corner of the city, whereby in only three days, about 120 beggars were shipped either back to their homes or to rehabilitation centers in the city (Maganga, 2008). Similar operations evacuating beggars from various public spaces have been implemented in Central Tanzania without success. Evidence shows that the strategies adopted to curb the problem of street begging have not been effective and rarely dissuade street beggars. Furthermore, the constitutionality of bans on begging has not been fully established in case law (Maganga, 2008). Efforts to curb the problem of street beggars and street begging have failed because governments and other stakeholders are not well informed about the categories of street beggars and the factors associated with begging activities. This lack of detailed information has led to the adoption of efforts that deal with the symptoms of begging rather than with the root causes of the begging problem.

To fill this information gap, we studied beggars in Central Tanzania where different categories of beggars are found in many public spaces begging for alms. Under the current semi-arid ecological conditions involving climate change and variability, soil infertility results in low crop production that leads to food and income poverty. As a result, the absence of other means for obtaining a sustainable livelihood and absolute poverty drive people into begging, either temporarily or permanently (Namwata et al., 2010; 2011). The focus of this study was to examine the categories of street beggars and factors that influence begging activities in Central Tanzania.

## STUDY LOCATION

Dodoma and Singida Municipalities were selected as case studies because they are large urban areas in Central Tanzania. Although poverty is said to be less acute in the urban areas of Tanzania, it is still a serious problem, especially in urban areas other than Dar es Salaam. The highest incidences of poverty in Tanzania are found in the regions of Rukwa, Kigoma, Dodoma, Mtwara, and Singida. These regions are either remote (Rukwa, Kigoma, & Mtwara), semi-arid (Dodoma & Singida), or both. From a biophysical perspective, the semi-arid areas are associated not only with low and erratic rainfall but also with poor soils and degraded environments in many areas. On the socio-economic front, large portions of these areas have minimal infrastructure, which impedes people's access to markets, health and educational facilities, safe water resources, etc. (Morris et al., 2001). This situation subjects people to poverty and in turn can lead community members to adopt alternative strategies for survival, such as rural-urban migration and street begging.

Based on the 2002 National Population and Housing Census, the population of

Dodoma was 324,347, including 157,469 males and 166,878 females. The population of Singida Municipality was 114,853, of whom 55,509 were males and 59,344 were females (DMC, 2008; SMC, 2008). The Central Zone's economy depends entirely on crop and livestock production. Agriculture is still characterized by low productivity. Although livestock production is still largely a subsistence enterprise, the Central Zone is one of the principal livestock-producing areas in the country (DMC, 2008; SMC, 2008). In Dodoma Municipality, the predominant ethnic group is Gogo. Other major tribes include Rangi and a tongue-clicking ethnic group of Sandawe, which only comprises a small percentage of the Municipal population. The predominant ethnic group in Singida Municipality is the Nyaturu. Other tribes include the Nyiramba, Chagga, Nyamwezi, and others. Both Christians and Muslims have strongholds of their faiths in these areas (DMC, 2008; SMC, 2008).

## METHODOLOGY

A cross-sectional research design was applied in this study. This design allows data to be collected from the target population at a single point in time. The population of the study consisted of street beggars and non-beggars, such as municipal officials, councilors, business people, and community members. Groups of non-street beggars were included to help triangulate and enrich the data collected from street beggars.

To meet the objectives of this study, both primary and secondary data were used. Primary data were collected using structured questionnaires, focus-group discussions (FGDs), key-informant interviews, and observations. These techniques sought, *inter alia*, to understand issues concerning categories of street beggars and factors associated with street begging from the perspectives of both street beggars and non-beggars.

Primary data were collected from 130 street beggars, who were found in public areas begging for alms, using convenience or accidental sampling methods. Given that street beggars keep moving from one place to another, it would have been very difficult to prepare a sampling framework that would have allowed the selection of desired samples using random sampling. Instead, interviewee selection was based on accessibility or availability on the streets. Street beggars were selected from a very wide variety of public spaces in order to ensure good representativeness.

Data were also collected from FGDs and key-informant interviews. Purposive sampling was used to collect data from 30 key informants. These included key informants from municipal authorities (such as Councilors, Street Chairpersons, Street Executive Officers in Swahili Street commonly known as *Mtaa*, Ward Executive Officers, Social Welfare Officers, Planning Officers, and Community Development Officers) and from the community (both street beggars and non-beggars). During the FGDs, small gifts, such as food and drinks, were offered to attract beggars and to compensate them for the valuable time spent during interviews. The focus groups were stratified into adult men, adult women, and youths. Each group consisted of five members from the study municipal authorities and

the community. In total, 12 FGDs (six in each municipality) were conducted.

Secondary data were derived from published and unpublished documents and literature that were related to street begging and the concepts cited by the respondents. The secondary data were collected from various sources, including journal articles, internet materials, and other documents that were relevant to the study.

Qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed separately so that they could complement and supplement each other. Qualitative data from observations, FGDs, and interviews were analyzed through theme and content analysis. Subsequently, questionnaire responses were coded, summarized, and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics were used to obtain frequencies and percentages for the coded responses.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results and discussions of the findings of this study are presented in four sub-sections: categories of street beggars, street begging strategies, reactions of passers-by to beggars, and factors influencing street begging in Central Tanzania.

### I. Categories of Street Beggars

The term “street beggars” is defined in this study as individuals, including children, elderly people, people with disabilities, and families, who normally beg or make their living from the streets or public spaces such as shopping areas, churches, and mosques by asking people for money and food. Adugna (2006) held the view that street beggars have generally been categorized in terms of their abilities and disabilities based on how they make their living from the streets. There were also individuals who did not show any externally observable deformities or disabilities. The present study, however, attempted to categorize street beggars in Central Tanzania into four groups based on where they slept after begging hours, contact with or ties to their families, i.e., whether they had abandoned or were abandoned by their families either permanently or temporarily, and whether they were born or raised in the streets. Table 1 shows the categories of street beggars in Central Tanzania.

#### *1. Beggars on the street (Ombaomba wanaorudi kulala majumbani)*

The first group of beggars earns money on the street for themselves and/or their families. Beggars in this group spend most of the day on the streets begging for alms, but they have permanent homes, they usually maintain family ties or contacts, and they often return home in the evening to sleep after spending the day on the street begging. The results in Table 1 show that 71.5% of all the sampled street beggars were beggars on the street who had homes to go to at night after begging.

FGDs showed that most of the beggars on the street (especially children) were staying with at least one parent, whereas others were staying with members of their extended families, such as grandparents, or sometimes with other beggars.

**Table 1.** Distribution of categories of street beggars by municipality

Category of street beggars	Municipality		Total
	Dodoma (N = 80) % (N)	Singida (N = 50) % (N)	(N = 130) % (N)
Beggars on the streets	68.8 (55)	76.0 (38)	71.5 (93)
Beggars of the streets	21.3 (17)	14.0 (7)	18.5 (24)
Beggars in the streets	8.8 (7)	10.0 (5)	9.2 (12)
Beggars of street families	1.3 (1)	Nil	0.8 (1)
Total	100.0 (80)	100.0 (50)	100.0 (130)

The majority of the beggars on the street came from poor families and therefore had to resort to begging as the primary means of obtaining a livelihood.

## 2. *Beggars of the streets (Ombaomba wanaolala mitaani na mara chache majumbani)*

This second group of beggars lived and slept on the streets and had loose family contacts. Beggars in this group normally spent some nights or days on the streets and very occasionally went back home. The results in Table 1 show that 18.5% of all encountered beggars were beggars of the street. The study also found that most beggars of the streets usually found accommodation around verandas or close to various public areas such as restaurants, shops, hotels or guesthouses, bars, etc. The rest found accommodation around bus terminals and railway stations or near markets and public offices. The study also found that it was very rare for beggars in this group to go back home in the evening or at night to sleep, or even to join or meet their families or relatives, as was evidenced by the comments of two street beggars:

My home town is Manyoni which is one of the districts in Singida Region [about 150 kilometers from Dodoma Municipality and 170 kilometers from Singida Municipality]. I have been in begging activities for three years now here in Dodoma. But for the first time, I started begging in Mwanza. The last time I went home was in 2009 during Christmas holidays just to check on them. Sincerely, I have no plan for staying in Manyoni ... life is too tough there!" said a street beggar in Dodoma Municipality.

A physically challenged beggar from Dodoma Municipality said that:

I am a Gogo from Mahomanyika village (about 20 kilometers from Dodoma Municipality). I rarely pay a visit to my relatives in the village. This is simply because when I am at home, no one takes care of me.

### 3. *Beggars in the streets (Ombaomba wanaoishi na kulala mitaani)*

Beggars in this third group were completely detached from or had abandoned (or been abandoned by) their families and their immediate communities, and they have drifted into the begging life. The findings in Table 1 show that 9.2% of all respondents in the two study municipalities were beggars in the streets.

### 4. *Beggars of street families (Ombaomba amba wazazi wote au mmoja ni ombaomba)*

People in the fourth group of beggars were born and raised on the streets. Most of them had parents who were beggars. These beggars and their parents engaged in begging activities, and they were quickly branded as beggars. These individuals were mainly established beggars in the street. FGDs revealed that this group represented a grey area among the three categories of street beggars listed above. There were also beggars who lived with one or both of their parents. They were either born on the streets (second-generation beggars) or had moved to the streets with their families. They may be referred to as 'street families.'

## II. Street-begging Strategies

In the context of this study, street begging or gathering alms is defined as the solicitation of a voluntary gift, most often money or food, in public places. FGDs revealed that street beggars used various begging strategies to make a living for themselves and their families. These techniques included portraying themselves as sick or as lacking bus fare to a village; pretending to be blind, deaf, or crippled; sending children into the street to beg (both children and parents as beggars); sitting in strategic places such as banks, hotels, churches, temples, mosques, or bars; entering offices with a medical referral letter; presenting a supporting letter for soliciting scholarly necessities either by children or parents; or claiming to have financial difficult. Below are key informants' narrations in relation to common begging strategies:

### *Using official letters to solicit funds*

One staff working with an NGO located at Area C in Dodoma Municipality commented that:

This is my tenth year being here in Dodoma. There is a woman I know. She is constantly in our office, every time begging for money, claiming to have received recommendations from the medical doctor not to perform heavy duties. She moves with the medical document supporting her claim. But the question here is, has this not been her begging style?

### *Sitting by the roadside begging from passersby*

This method was mainly used by disabled people, such as blind and crippled people. It was reported and observed that these people have permanent locations and sometimes places to sit when begging. This was confirmed by one Indian trader in Dodoma.

I always mediate clashes between that old man outside there when other beggars come and try to sit on that veranda. The old man has dominated that place; he does not allow anyone to beg from there. What I usually do is to give alms to the intruding beggar to leave the place. It happens constantly.

### III. Reactions of Passersby to Beggars

Through observations, it was found that some street beggars beg from passersby or pedestrians by stretching their arms out and speaking phrases like “Buy me food (*ninunulie chakula*);” “Give me alms (*naomba msaada*);” “Give me money for shelter or medication (*nisaidie kwa ajili ya malazi au matibabu*);” etc. Sympathizers usually respond by saying either “I have nothing (*sina kitu*)” or “Let God help you (*Mungu akubariki*).” When responding to beggars’ demands, most passersby use phrases like “I have nothing to offer you (*sina kitu cha kukupa*);” “Come later (*njoo baadae*);” or “Go away from here (*ondoka hapa*),” just to make beggars move away from them. In some instances, street beggars experience aggressive and unkind responses from passersby, although this situation has not discouraged them from begging activities.

On the other hand, the FGDs revealed that although some passersby are harsh sometimes, others seem to be generous and sympathetic to beggars. Individuals who seemed to be generous and sympathetic to beggars were potential alms-givers, in contrast to individuals who acted harshly. Older people were more generous and sympathetic than were youths. However, street beggars varied in their success in drawing the attention of passersby. More attention was given to beggars with physical disabilities and to elderly individuals than to young and able beggars. Similar findings were reported by Adugna (2006) when studying livelihoods and survival strategies among migrant children in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

During FGDs, it was reported that begging was perceived as being done by people who were not capable of working to provide for themselves for a variety of reasons, including poverty, physical disability, etc. One FGD member in Dodoma Municipality remarked that:

Surprisingly, today, the trend has changed as some energetic persons, instead of working to care for themselves, now see begging as the most convenient and surest way of making money because of laziness. Many people know they can survive from begging. People decide to be lazy waiting to reap hard-earned money from others.

### IV. Factors Influencing the Phenomenon of Street Begging

Increased incidences of street begging in many urban areas are connected to the socio-economic realities that prevail in the families of street beggars and in local communities. Generally, the problem of street beggars and begging activi-



ties cannot be related to a single cause or factor. Instead, it is a multi-dimensional problem in which a combination of factors often leads to an individual beggar's ending up on the street. Table 2 presents factors that influence begging activities in Central Tanzania.

The results in Table 2 indicate that poverty was mentioned as the most notable reason (46.2%) for people adopting a begging lifestyle. Similar findings were reported by Ogunkan and Fawole (2009), Ogunkan (2009), Amman (2006), and Tambawal (2010) and Jelili (2006). As a result, the poor are trapped into a begging lifestyle, with little chance of escape. In such a vicious cycle, poverty is maintained across generations. To meet their basic needs, the poor, resort to begging.

Street beggars in Dodoma Municipality cited physical disabilities or challenges (45%) as one of the important factors for begging than did their counterparts in Singida Municipality (12%), although the reasons for the different rates of physical disabilities or challenges between the two municipalities were unclear. FGDs revealed that due to societal neglect, physically handicapped street beggars, in contrast to other categories of street beggars, have no option except to depend on other people for their daily bread.

Similar findings were reported by the Centre for Services and Information on Disability (2008). In a developing country such as Bangladesh, persons with disabilities face many challenges and barriers, as well as competition for jobs. In this situation, it is almost impossible for persons with disabilities to find jobs or to start economic activities. They face not only immense competition from people who are not disabled but also unfair barriers that are created because of the negative attitudes of employers. Even if a few people are employed, they find themselves in an environment that is generally unfriendly and unsuitable with respect to their disability.

**Table 2.** Factors influencing street begging in Central Tanzania

Factor (s) for begging	Municipality		Total
	Dodoma (N = 80)	Singida (N = 50)	(N = 130)
	% (N)	% (N)	% (N)
Poverty	35.0 (28)	64.0 (32)	46.2 (60)
Physical disability or challenges	45.0 (36)	12.0 (6)	31.5 (41)
Death of both parents (orphanhood)	7.5 (6)	8.0 (4)	7.7 (10)
Family disintegration	3.8 (3)	6.0 (3)	4.6 (6)
Old age	1.3 (1)	8.0 (4)	3.8 (5)
Convinced by friends or peer influence	3.8 (3)	Nil	2.3 (3)
Unemployment	2.5 (2)	Nil	1.5 (2)
Lack of caring relatives	Nil	2.0 (1)	0.8 (1)
Medical illness	1.3 (1)	Nil	0.8 (1)
Total	100.0 (80)	100.0 (50)	100.0 (130)

An interview with a Councilor in Dodoma Municipality revealed that some families do not take their disabled children to school. This hinders their ability to obtain knowledge and skills that would help them either find employment or become involved in self-employment. When these children face any kind of isolation or lack of care and attention, the majority resort to begging activities.

The death of their parents was another factor that influenced street begging life according to 7.7% of the sampled respondents, as is shown in Table 2. FGDs suggested that some street beggars, particularly children, had lost, through either death or divorce, their biological parent(s). Such children decided to move to the streets rather than stay with a step-parent or in an extended family setting. One nine-year-old street beggar in Dodoma Municipality had the following view:

Our father died when we were young. My mum had given birth to six of us. I am the second-last child. Our mother could not afford to meet our family's basic needs such as food, paraffin, and clothes. Our relatives did not care about our welfare. That is why my two brothers and I have chosen begging as a way to support our family!

Considering family disintegration, the study found that family disintegration could create an emergency that led some children to life in the streets; this reason was cited by 4.6% of the sampled street beggars (see Table 2). FGDs revealed that family fragmentation has resulted in increasing numbers of family members living in either separations or divorce. Interviews with key informants further revealed that the vulnerability of the children of men and women who become single parents due to divorce, separation, or the death of a spouse is often increased due to violence and abandonment when the parent remarries.

On the other hand, children with a single parent sometimes keep moving between paternal and maternal relatives and therefore lack stable support. These children sometimes choose to move to the street and start begging. Illustrating this circumstance, another 12-year-old male interviewee who had a single parent commented that:

I lost my father in my infancy. My mother got married to another man. I was neglected; no one was there to care for me. The death of my father meant my poor mother could hardly tend to my basic needs such as food, clothing, and education. My initial hope of getting a formal education was lost. At that point, I went to the streets to start begging, with a hope that things would be much better than at home. As you can see, the situation I'm living in is still miserable.

Finally, the sampled beggars held the view that unemployment compels some people into begging for survival. This explanation was endorsed by a small percentage (1.5%) of the sampled street beggars who reported that street begging was the result of unemployment (Table 2). This was only mentioned by respondents from Dodoma Municipality. Likewise, municipal officials reported that widespread unemployment was one of the causes of street begging. Some beggars moved

from one office to another asking for help. Their numbers increase when employment opportunities become scarce. However, not all those who beg lack other means of survival; some people have simply found begging to be a good means of earning a living.

## CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study show that there are four categories of street beggars in Central Tanzania: beggars on the street, beggars of the streets, beggars in the streets, and beggars of street families. The study found that street beggars used various begging strategies, including disguising themselves to appear sick; pretending to be blind, deaf, or crippled; sending children into the street to beg; sitting in strategic places; moving into offices with medical referral letters; etc. Passersby seemed to be generous and sympathetic to beggars, although some people were harsh to beggars. The study found that the factors that cause people to become street beggars and the phenomenon of begging are diverse and multifaceted. Poverty influences begging to a large extent in all of the studied municipalities. Other factors included unemployment, physical challenges, death of both parents, and family disintegration.

To address the problem of street beggars and begging activities in Central Tanzania, we provide the following recommendations:

- Policy planners must adopt multi-faceted, multi-targeted, and multi-tiered approaches if they are to have any impact on the lives of street beggars in all four categories. Specific policies and other legislative frameworks are needed in terms of age, sex, disability, and family-related issues to effectively address the begging problem. In this regard, both preventative and responsive interventions are needed instead of rehabilitative solutions for each category of street beggars.
- More efforts should be placed on changing community attitudes towards beggars who are children with disabilities and emphasizing the necessity of educating children with disabilities in order to enable them to face their future as independent individuals.
- In as much as begging activities are not good at all, governments and other stakeholders should create opportunities for street beggars to make a living by other means.

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