



# Aid or exploitation?: Food-for-work, cash-for-work, and the production of “beneficiary-workers” in Ethiopia and Haiti



Lauren Carruth\*, Scott Freeman

School of International Service, American University, 4400 Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington, DC 20016, USA

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## ABSTRACT

The distinct subject positions of “beneficiaries” and “aid workers” pervade global aid vernacular, the grey development literature, and the field of development studies, but this binary obscures additional and vital forms of labor within the global aid industry. This analysis is based on the juxtaposition, comparison, and historical contextualization of two case studies drawing on two independent ethnographic research projects in the Somali Region of Ethiopia and southwestern Haiti. We find that although not designated either “employees” or “aid workers,” many beneficiaries are required to work to qualify for assistance: for example, food-for-work programs in Ethiopia and cash-for-work programs in Haiti both require beneficiaries to perform difficult manual labor with aid agencies to qualify for disbursements of food or cash. Accordingly, participants in these programs figure themselves workers and not the passive recipients of charity, and in both places, we find that participants critique the inadequacy of the wages for their work. Beneficiaries who work for aid are therefore what we call “beneficiary-workers:” they work within the aid industry, but are neither officially employed nor adequately compensated for their labor. Further, these beneficiary-workers are alienated both from the benefits of their labor and the means of designing or leading the aid programs on which they depend. Aid that requires beneficiary-workers’ labor is therefore not fundamentally designed to alleviate poverty or spur economic development; it is instead designed to discipline the poor and to valorize and justify the aid organizations that delimit their labor. By revealing the effects of food-for-work and cash-for-work project in these two places, and by highlighting the critiques of work-for-aid projects leveled by participants themselves, this analysis questions the ethics and appropriateness of food-for-work and cash-for-work projects.

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## 1. Introduction

“It is not fair, how hard we work, and for what?”

-Ubah,<sup>1</sup> a participant in food-for-work programs in Ethiopia  
“they pay in [Haitian] *Goud* for people to work with the hoe and pick. But they pay [US] dollars for people who make the reports. This is a type of slavery!”

-Lebel, a participant in cash-for-work in Haiti

Ubah and Lebel’s exclamations articulate an unusual critique of global aid. They argue not that food-for-work and cash-for-work programs offer too little assistance, or that they are inappropriately

designed. Rather, Ubah and Lebel allege they were unfairly compensated for the work they performed. For them, aid is not a “gift” (Bornstein, 2012; Stirrat & Henkel, 1997), but rather something obtained through an exchange of their labor. Their work, as Rossi (2017) phrases it, is “unfree.” And so the conditions in which they work and the amount they are compensated are legitimate grounds for critique. In addition, because of the unlikely symmetry and audacity of Ubah and Lebel’s assessments—divided as they are by oceans as well as divergent colonial histories, histories of foreign intervention, and local economies of labor—their discourses of dissent transcend the particularities of their situations and instead call into question larger assumptions about the nature and effects of assistance to the poor.

Foreign aid programs typically depict aid as flows of funding, projects, and expertise from generous “donors” to needy “beneficiaries,” drawing on the labor and expertise of “aid workers” (Krause, 2014; Rossi, 2006, 2017). The binary distinction of “aid workers” who work, from “beneficiaries” who passively benefit,

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [lcarruth@american.edu](mailto:lcarruth@american.edu) (L. Carruth), [freeman@american.edu](mailto:freeman@american.edu) (S. Freeman).

<sup>1</sup> All proper names and some organization titles have been changed to ensure interlocutors’ anonymity.

is so commonplace in global aid vernacular, grey literature, and development studies (e.g. OCHA, 2017) that it often goes unquestioned. Assumptions that beneficiaries are not workers, and that aid workers cannot also be beneficiaries, distract from dynamic relationships of exchange and labor inequities inherent to the global aid industry (Ferguson, 2015; Fechter, 2011; Krause, 2014; Maes, 2016; Rossi, 2006, 2017; Stirrat & Henkel, 1997). This reality, one highlighted by Ubah and Lebel, demands an analytical framework and vocabulary that does not simply accept the dichotomous categories of “beneficiary” and “aid worker” but rather pays close attention to policies and language that continue to distinguish, reify, and repeat this mutual exclusion. A corresponding new term developed here, the *beneficiary-worker*, instead signifies the ambivalent and dual positionalities beneficiaries who work for aid embody. We argue that the figure of the beneficiary-worker—as neither a recognized employee within the global aid industry, nor a passive beneficiary receiving gifts—is vital to both the production and justification for aid to the poor. Additionally, because beneficiary-workers are never considered employees, their rights, compensation, and the conditions in which they work remain unquestioned and excluded from efforts within the aid industry to recognize and value locally hired aid workers (e.g. OCHA, 2011; ODI, 2013).

In Ethiopia and Haiti, for example, food- and cash-for work programs require beneficiaries to perform various forms of manual labor to qualify for aid, including digging ditches and pulling out invasive vegetation (Associates in Rural Development, 1990; Ministry of Agriculture, 2014). Food-for work and cash-for-work projects are designed to assist households in need but also ensure recipients do not become “dependent” on free handouts, therefore improving the efficiency and sustainability of aid (Harvey & Lind, 2005; Lind & Jalleta, 2005; Little, 2008). Requiring beneficiaries to participate in aid projects, likewise, represents an effort on the part of aid agencies to train and engage people in economically productive and potentially empowering activities (Hickey & Mohan, 2004; Mosse, 2003, 2005). However, in Ethiopia and Haiti, work-for-aid interventions produce only modest and fleeting improvements to households’ subsequent income and nutritional status, and do little to redress the larger social and economic structures that cause people’s continuing poverty and vulnerability to crisis (Debela, Shively, & Holden, 2015; Devereux et al., 2006; Little, 2008; Richardson, 1997; White & Jickling, 1995). Participants remain impoverished and labeled “beneficiaries,” even as they work hard and benefit little from aid. Plus, as this paper will demonstrate, these programs are not wholly lauded by the populations they target. So, we ask, why do these programs persist? Why are impoverished people so often required to perform difficult and dangerous types of work for aid, if these programs fail to produce meaningful and lasting improvements in their lives?

To answer these questions, this analysis draws on ethnographic data collection in Ethiopia and Haiti, as well as a historical review of labor programs and work requirements in major donor countries like the United States. Juxtapositions of beneficiaries’ labor through time as well as across space reveal how programs that require the poor to work are not designed to reduce poverty and are not particularly responsive to the contexts of labor in any one place. They are not unique to food-for-work, cash-for-work, development assistance, humanitarian response, Ethiopia, or Haiti. Rather, around the world, in donor countries as well as countries that receive global aid, these programs are about “improving poor people” (Katz, 1995), delimiting and enforcing what it means to be a needy but also deserving recipient of assistance, and reifying and reproducing moral distinctions between the deficient, delinquent poor (Li, 2007; James, 2010; Wacquant, 2009) and the benevolent constituents of the global aid industry.

## 2. Ethnographic methodologies

Ethiopia and Haiti are both major recipients of foreign assistance. Ethiopia is the highest overall recipient of official development aid in Africa (OECD 2018), and Haiti has been called the “Republic of NGOs” (Schuller, 2017).<sup>2</sup> While the particular histories and contexts of these two field sites differ in many ways, they are both locations where many beneficiaries of aid are now required to work. And in both Ethiopia and Haiti, beneficiaries find the compensation for their labor to qualify for aid “not fair” and like “slavery!” This analysis therefore uses comparative ethnography to analyze what accounts for these similar aid forms and similar emic critiques of aid.

Social scientists have long used comparative methodological approaches to uncover meaningful social patterns. For example, anthropologists’ use of “defamiliarization by cross-cultural juxtaposition” (Marcus and Fischer, 1986, 257) was designed to challenge assumptions about the universality of human nature by comparing supposedly radically “other” and different cultures, mostly, to American and European standards. However, our analysis is different. We instead examine “the way that similar phenomena” – namely, work-for-aid programs – “unfold in distinct, socially-produced locations that are connected in multiple and complex ways” (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017, 51). Juxtapositions of congruent interventions and critiques emerging in these different places, in this case, reveal “new social and semantic spaces, new sets of relations, new political subjects, and new webs of meaning” (Shore, Wright, Peró, 2011, 11). These resonances were apparent and meaningful when, subsequent to our independent data collection, we compared data across our two ethnographic field sites and considered the two cases in all of their contextual particularities. In contrast to neo-positivist case comparisons, thus here we collaboratively trace the origins and effects of work-for-aid as it unfolds through time in different moments and spaces (Mintz, 1996), including in donor countries like the United States, where much of the funding for labor programs in Ethiopia and Haiti derive (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017; Maxwell, 2013). The figure of the “beneficiary-worker,” consequently, exists unrooted from our specific ethnographic projects, these specific contexts, or the experiences of individuals like Ubah and Lebel, and instead reveals the ideological work of poverty alleviation and development itself.

## 3. Historical perspective: From the “sturdy beggar to the beneficiary-worker

In western donor countries, the roots of requiring the poor to work stretch back centuries. Charity to the poor was mostly a subject of religious doctrine prior to the rise of secular political powers in Europe; Saint Francis of Assisi, for example, argued that the poor were blessed. But beginning in the 14th century, as fears of social disorder rose among the English ruling class, care for the poor shifted from a charge of the Church to a function of the State. Then, with its population drastically reduced by the Black Death, England suffered from a chronic labor shortage. The Poor Law Act of 1388 tried to both fix wages, sedentarize the poor, and curb migration

<sup>2</sup> Although Ethiopia is viewed by many as a model developmental state (Clapham, 2018), the Somali Region within Ethiopia, where this research took place, presents an exception and exhibits some of the worst health and economic indicators in the country (DHS Program 2016). Further, while Ethiopia remains a symbol of anticolonialism and Pan-Africanism, it was also a global imperial power and enslaved and militarily occupied minority groups including Somalis within Ethiopia well into the twentieth century (Aidid, 2020). Haiti’s position as the first Black republic, and the place in which modern human rights were first fully claimed and asserted remains in stark contrast to the narrative of Haiti as “the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere,” a narrative more explicitly drawn on by contemporary aid interventions (Dubois, 2012; Ulysse, 2015).

through the imposition of various labor programs (Fraser, 2009). Idleness, begging, and vagrancy were from then on primarily viewed as criminal and a threat to social order (Nicholls, 1854; Quigley, 1996). By 1576, if someone wanted public assistance in England, they had to work for it.

Then in 1601, the English Poor Laws were ratified to target the “idle poor” for incarceration in “houses of correction” (Fraser, 2009); these were later called “workhouses,” and were designed to “improve the morals and manners” of “able-bodied paupers” (Boulton, 2014, 154), “whose cheap labor was needed to keep the workhouses running at the lowest possible cost” (Fowler, 2007, 92). Subsequently, throughout the British Empire including in colonial America, relief policies used the labor of the poor to achieve social control and profit extraction (Quigley, 1996). During famines in the 19th century in colonial Northern India and Ireland, millions were employed in public works projects, but again, profits from these programs largely benefited English businesses rather than the peasantry (Walker & Maxwell, 2014).

The design of English Poor Laws later inspired the “New Deal” public works projects in the wake of the Great Depression in the United States (Katz, 1995). While many of these New Deal projects improved infrastructures and landscapes, some were mocked by participants: the Work Projects Administration (WPA) was sardonically referred to as “We Piddle Around” (Smith, 1992). The idea of poverty as simultaneously a personal failure and a threat to the social order was central to what, in the late 20th century U.S., became known as “workfare” (Wacquand, 2009). Work requirements for the receipt of “welfare” ignored the structural roots of rising poverty and instead focused on “the inner moral character or values of the victims,” essentially returning to “the oldest distinction in social policy history— between the deserving and undeserving poor” (Struthers, 1996, 9). “Workfare,” together with an expanded penal system to incarcerate persons who were able-bodied but unemployed or noncompliant, was fundamentally designed to discipline and punish the poor (Katz, 1995; Wacquand, 2009).

Perhaps the culmination of this, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (known widely as “welfare reform”), passed in the U.S. in 1996, and for the first time instituted and successfully enforced work requirements on recipients (Quigley, 1998). Programs like this reduced the number of people receiving aid simply by pushing people unable to work out of the program and even deeper into poverty. Further, the stated purpose of “workfare” and “welfare reform” were not to reduce poverty individually or collectively, but rather to “promote a culture of work over dependency” (Falk, McCarty, Aussenberg, 2014, 2). Not much has changed. Between 2017 and 2019, several states in the U.S. have attempted to institute work requirements for beneficiaries seeking income subsidies, health insurance subsidies, and other forms of federal and state-based assistance to the poor (Hahn et al., 2017). English Poor Laws and colonial relief programs therefore share with more recent welfare reforms and work requirements the assumptions that poverty is the result of personal moral – not economic – failing, and therefore that “able-bodied” persons should have to work to receive assistance (Quigley, 1998, 101).

The dynamic principles and structures of domestic welfare programs in many donor countries shape these same countries’ concurrent foreign aid practices (Noël and Therien, 1995). In other words, the domestic mission to forcibly transform “cultures of dependency” into “cultures of work” (to paraphrase Falk et al., 2014), are exported through foreign aid. During the late 20th century, externally-funded aid programs in low-income countries including Ethiopia and Haiti began to explicitly reference the moral necessity of local “participation” to address beneficiaries’ perceived innate moral deficiencies and prevent their potential

“dependency” on aid distributions (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Edkins, 2000; Li, 2007; Fraser & Gordon, 1994; Harvey & Lind, 2005; Lind & Jalleta, 2005; Little, 2008; Richardson, 1997). For example, the UN World Food Program—to which the U.S. is the top country contributor (WFP, 2018)—frames food-for-work and labor conditionalities as ways to build “assets and self-reliance” by teaching skills and building infrastructure (Walker & Maxwell, 2014, 102). In a similar effort to disincentivize participation and discourage people’s reliance on aid, the United States Agency for International Development pays “less than market rate” to the impoverished participants of cash-for-work programs in low-income countries (USAID, 2018, 3).

In sum, the moralities and policies of domestic poverty alleviation in donor countries like the United States cannot be considered either entirely separate or entirely different from poverty alleviation in places these countries intervene abroad. The terminologies to signify beneficiaries’ labor have evolved over time and differ between domestic and international spheres; work-for-aid programs are also adapted to numerous situations and various narratives of progress and development. However, their purposes remain constant: to transform beneficiaries’ work ethic, and not to merely force beneficiaries to work. Contemporary food- and cash-for-work in Ethiopia and Haiti, funded in large part through contributions from and organizations headquartered in the United States, are paradigmatic. These programs attempt to produce and promote the figure of the deserving and needy beneficiary, and in so doing, prove the benevolence and necessity of aid to the poor.

#### 4. Work and aid in the Somali Region of Ethiopia

Data from Ethiopia were collected as part of a multi-sited ethnographic research project since 2007 in Ethiopia’s Somali National Regional State (abbreviated as the Somali Region) to understand the lasting social effects of temporary humanitarian assistance and medical interventions (Carruth, 2016, 2018). People introduced from Ethiopia reside in the rural community of Degago, in the arid, eastern edge of Somali Region of Ethiopia near the borders of Somaliland and Djibouti. In the 19th-20th centuries, Somalis in the Horn of Africa were partitioned among four empires: France, Italy, Great Britain, and Ethiopia. Each of these imposed artificial borders through homelands and cut communities off from natural resources, markets, extended families, and places of worship. “Ethiopia was never colonized,” one Somali-Ethiopian man said, “...but people within Ethiopia have been colonized—the Somali for one.” The formation of the constitutionally autonomous Somali Region within Ethiopia guaranteed the region a modicum of independence, but also contributes to the marginalization of Somalis vis-à-vis the Ethiopian federal government (Aidid, 2020; Samatar, 2004; Vaughan, 2019).

Despite outbreaks of violence and displacement along regional and international borders during the last fifteen years, Degago and surrounding communities have remained largely peaceful and marginal to conflicts unfolding nearby. Most residents of Degago earn income from petty trade or the *khat*<sup>3</sup> industry, but are also part of extended families of pastoralists and semi-pastoralists that own and trade livestock. Unlike other parts of Ethiopia that have witnessed the growth of industrialized agriculture and factories, very few wage labor opportunities have ever existed there.

People are aware of wage labor elsewhere, however. A vast majority of people living in and around Degago report they have at least one family member who has migrated to Gulf States, through Libya to Europe, or to the cities of Addis Ababa or Nairobi for work. Most of the jobs available to Somali-Ethiopians who

<sup>3</sup> A mild narcotic leaf.

migrate involve construction, domestic labor, and factory work. Thus while few wage labor opportunities are available in rural communities like Degago, residents regularly discuss labor in relation to what they know about conditions elsewhere. Many young residents of Degago dream of one day leaving home to find work.

Most residents of Degago remain designated by the Government of Ethiopia as chronically food insecure (OCHA, 2017; Tull, 2017), but the local economy was, according to residents during this research, as vibrant as it had ever been. Even so, due to recurrent outbreaks of infectious diseases and droughts, many households still receive occasional donations of potable water and intermittent healthcare services through various international and Ethiopian aid agencies. Before 2015, a majority of households in Degago also received regular donations of food rations from the UN World Food Programme (WFP) and USAID. Since 2016, however, families in Degago have only received rations through the government's Productive Safety Net Programme (or PSNP). The PSNP is a federally-organized but mostly externally-funded food-and-cash-for-work program designed to provide a safety net to chronically food insecure rural Ethiopians (Ministry of Agriculture, 2014).

#### 4.1. The reality of food-for-work

For the last 28 years, Maryan has been serving as a midwife in communities within walking distance of her home in Degago. In the mid-1980s a refugee camp was built on one edge of town. During this period, Maryan was given basic medical training by the NGO *Médecins Sans Frontières* (MSF), and worked as a traditional birth attendant and medical assistant in the clinic that was first run by MSF, then later administered by UNHCR and the Ethiopian government's Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs office. Ever since the camp closed in 2005 and most displaced persons left, Maryan has continued providing care to mothers and babies in an informal practice for which she receives small gifts in return. Maryan has four children, including one adult daughter named Ubah.

Since 2016, the only form of food or cash assistance her household has received has been through the PSNP. For two years, Maryan and Ubah, alongside their neighbors and friends, worked to pull out and destroy the invasive *Prosopis* trees (commonly called mesquite trees in English) that now proliferate along dry riverbeds (see Figure 1). Ironically, these trees were introduced by UNHCR in 1989 to control the erosion of sandy embankments and to provide refugees a source of firewood. However, the trees soon outcompeted several other indigenous plant species. Many residents and experts in local governmental offices speculate that *Prosopis* have contributed to falling water tables as well. These invasive trees, everyone in the town agrees, must go. The PSNP in Degago was designed to address this issue and is part of nationwide efforts in Ethiopia to mitigate climate change and to rehabilitate depleted landscapes.

It takes several hours or more, working in the sunny desert of Degago, where midday temperatures regularly top 100 degrees Fahrenheit, to remove even one tree. Beneficiaries like Maryan and Ubah can work only five days per month removing and hauling the invasive mesquites, and then for only a maximum of six months per year. For one day of work, often totaling realistically about five hours of work plus transit and breaks – people receive three kilograms of whole-wheat grain, worth approximately 15 Ethiopian *birr*, or US\$0.54.

By the end of the month, working the maximum allowed number of days, Maryan and Ubah reported they earn 15 kg of whole grain wheat per month. Since people are only allowed to work a total of six months per year in the program, that means they can earn, at most, earn the equivalent of 450 *birr* per year, what was

at that time, a little over US\$20. This matches the guidelines published in the Government of Ethiopia's PSNP Implementation Report (Ministry of Agriculture, 2014). Compensation for the same amount of low-wage manual labor in nearby rural communities and cities at the time would have been approximately 150–200 *birr* per day, or for the same number of hours and days per year, 4500–6000 *birr* (or US\$216–\$288 in 2016)—over ten times the PSNP rate.

This work is not just “cheap,” as the Government of Ethiopia admits, it is also dangerous. The district-level government office that organizes the PSNP provided beneficiaries inexpensive, rickety, and now rusty axes and shovels, but did not provide either gloves or any other kind of protective equipment. During the second month of the work cycle in 2016, a woman named Dayibo, who was working with Ubah and Maryan to extract invasive mesquites, was seriously injured. As several women pulled on one rough and sticky trunk, a large branch suddenly broke free, slamming into Dayibo's face and poking her directly in the right eye.

Her eye stung and could not open, she reported, and it bled badly for several hours. But there was no one who could provide first aid or medical care: even the small clinic in Degago was unstaffed and locked because the community health worker was several hours away attending a workshop. The nearest hospital was at least a two-hour drive further northeast, across the international border, in Djibouti. But no one in Degago had a car. The closest ambulance that could have transported her was in a remote community over 20 km away, outside the range of mobile phones, so there was not even a way to hail the driver.

Ubah recalled, with emotion, Dayibo's predicament: “What could we do?” Drawing on her years of training by humanitarian organizations and work as a midwife, Maryan helped Dayibo wash and patch her eye with bandages.

The next day, this incident was reported to supervisors of the PSNP at the regional government by the local PSNP manager, a salaried government employee (making 10,000 *birr* or US\$370.00 per month) who works in the county seat of Aysha, twelve kilometers away. But neither anyone from the government nor sponsoring NGOs ever followed up or checked on Dayibo. Dayibo received three kilograms of wheat for her one day of work on the day she was injured. In the future, if the government decides to renew the program in Degago, a PSNP monitor explained, she may qualify for direct support without labor due to her disability. She is no longer considered “able-bodied” and she will receive the same US\$20 per year at most like other qualifying adults who are unable to work. Several months later, Dayibo was still blind in that eye.

As the number of people in Degago who receive regular food rations has dramatically fallen in the last five years, and at the same time, as the number of residents enrolled in the PSNP has increased, numerous residents have begun to rethink the role and potentials of aid in their communities. One of Maryan's neighbors who worked on the PSNP described this change, “as the way organizations are now. We have to work now, there is no other way.”

Ali, a young father who grew up in the refugee camp, in 2015 helped manage two different PSNP interventions. He reflected on changes the PSNP program instituted, compared to relief programs in the past in Degago, as we drove between towns, talking about the history of various NGOs nearby:

“We here, we were once refugees, you see, and I think at that time we expected to receive everything, all the food, all the medicine, for free. But not now. Today we must work to develop our communities; the people must work to get this aid. But the people here are not used to working to receive [aid]. I think by talking about these things, these changes, I am convincing them now. I am helping them change. We cannot just take food and





Fig. 1. Participants in the PSNP in Degago, Ethiopia pull out invasive *Prosopis* trees, 2016. Photo by Lauren Carruth.

things and not do any work. This is how things are now. But this is difficult to understand for the people here.”

While Ali acknowledged the historical reality of beneficiaries receiving aid commodities without having to work, he did not complain about having to work for assistance. Instead, in his role as a PSNP organizer and monitor, he acknowledged the contemporary reality that beneficiaries in Degago and elsewhere must now work to receive assistance. He now explicitly encourages people to work for aid as part of his job with the PSNP: “I am helping them change,” he said again in English, repeating common aid discourse, “we must battle this dependency on aid.” Ironically himself formerly a refugee and a former recipient of humanitarian assistance, Ali was part of efforts to transform Somalis’ subject positions within the global aid system, to encourage “participation” in aid in order to prevent their “dependency” on external assistance (Harvey & Lind, 2005, Little, 2008), and to foster a reformed culture of work, deserving of global assistance.

Indeed, today most of Ali’s and Maryan’s neighbors, family members, and friends participate in the PSNP for supplements to their diets, and do not receive food aid rations through other aid programs. Laborers in the PSNP did not report personal satisfaction, pride, empowerment, or strengthened social networks as a result of their work (cf. Ethiopian community health workers described in Maes, 2016). Participants in the PSNP did not gain a sense of belonging to either the Ethiopian state or nongovernmental organizations through their labor, either. By contrast, a participant in an Ethiopian state-run road construction project described in Daniel Mains’s ethnographic research (Mains, 2012), saw his work as politically and socially meaningful: “It is important that [he] speaks of himself as a[n Ethiopian] government employee,” Mains states, and through his labor, “... the young male rock worker is becoming part of the state, and many young men are willing to put aside their cynicism about the ruling party in exchange for such a relationship” (Mains, 2012, 19). However, rather than being given the opportunity to participate in a governmental program, earn a certified degree or a salary for nurse-midwifery, and rather than being able to obtain a job in the development, humanitarian, or natural resource management industries, Maryan can only toil with her daughter in the dirt, pulling out invasive trees, for bags of grain worth only approximately US \$20. These beneficiary-workers in the PSNP did not express gratefulness, empowerment, political affinity, or emancipation for the chance to be part of these projects. The trees removed were not symbolic of development, political progress, or environmental recuperation, and modifications to the landscape failed to mean-

ingfully contribute to sustainable improvements in residents’ future economic or agricultural prospects. Work-for-aid was instead derided and characterized, essentially, by its Sisyphean absurdity.

## 5. Poverty and development in Haiti

Data presented from Haiti were collected between 2012 and 2018 in two communes in the rural, southwestern part of the country: Lejè and Damon. With funding from a European donor country, the Initiative for Haiti’s Coast (IHC), partnered with local and international NGOs to promote several multi-sectoral development plans. And as part of IHC’s agro-environmental work, the International Relief Corps (IRC), another international NGO, together with several local sub-contracted farmers’ associations, implemented cash-for-work projects that paid individuals for building soil conservation structures and planting agricultural demonstration plots.

Most residents in the hillsides of southwest Haiti farm, herd livestock, run small businesses, and some work in the NGO industry. The Haitian peasantry has long provided financial support to the state through the production of agricultural commodities (Trouillot, 1990). The U.S. occupation of Haiti from 1915 to 1934 increased the forced contribution of the peasantry to government and merchant coffers—contributions that were then further consolidated under the Duvalier dictatorship. The post-Duvalier years have been defined by neoliberal reforms that decreased social welfare, government services, and notably, agricultural support (Shamsie, 2012). Disasters such as the 2010 earthquake and 2016 hurricane Matthew further impoverished farmers and increased their need for external assistance.

For farmers in Haiti, agricultural labor is largely the domain of reciprocal and rotational labor groups. The practices of such groups—*konbit*, *eskwad*, and *ranpono*—are widespread and differentiated in part by region (Romain, 1974; Smith, 2001). Rotational labor typically moves from one member’s land to another, providing a group of workers to tackle tasks like weeding and planting. Some of these groups, notably the *eskwad* or  *ekip*, often sell their labor time to other non-member landowners. The cash paid by the landowner is not divided among the workers individually, but rather saved until Haitian Independence Day, the first of January. On that day, an animal is purchased and the meat divided among the group for the famous meal of pumpkin soup. Such activities celebrate the freedom of the enslaved of *Saint Domingue*, whose access to meat was restricted (Smith, 2001). These practices, which draw on notions of independence, delayed distribution of

benefits, and shared non-cash investments in agriculture, are starkly and explicitly different from aid-based wage labor (Freeman, 2017).

Starting in the 1990s, in the wake of numerous critiques of top-down development projects in Haiti, externally funded governmental organizations and NGOs designed cash-for-work interventions to inject wage labor and simultaneously increase “local participation.” Despite these “participatory” approaches, the hierarchical structure of aid remained largely unchanged (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; James, 2010; Smith, 2001). Haitians throughout the country— though often in dire need of wage labor opportunities— are critical of these programs. Workers in post-earthquake Port-au-Prince, for example, ridiculed participation in aid as mere “social appeasement”— they saw such efforts as ploys designed to pacify recipients (Kivland, 2012).

Programs that delimit the labor of the poor have also long been tools of social control in Haiti: Dictator Francois Duvalier paid cash in exchange for work as a form of political patronage and combined it with state terror in order to prevent uprising (Haiti Grassroots Watch, 2012). Since then, government programs (and government functionaries) have used the distribution of jobs as a way to garner political favor. More extreme forms of group labor occurred in the early 20th century, when the US occupation revived an 1864 Haitian law and constructed roads using forced *corvée* labor for groups of peasants who were unable to pay taxes (Schmidt, 1971). Histories of forced labor, attempts by NGOs to increase “participation” through labor and other means, and globally circulating logics of work-for-relief comprise the “policy world” (Shore et al., 2011) of contemporary cash-for-work in Haiti.

### 5.1. Conservation for cash

Shortly after the first international development intervention in Haiti in 1949 and erosion was defined as a dire issue for Haiti, soil conservation became a regular part of agricultural instruction (Efron, 1955). But many external soil conservation measures had questionable results, required substantial labor investments, and presented little economic value to farmers (Associates in Rural Development, 1990; White & Jickling, 1995). Because Haitian farmers did not volunteer to build soil conservation structures, NGOs had to pay farmers to get them to participate (Associates in Rural Development, 1990).

Since the 1980s, USAID has used soil conservation not as an environmental intervention, but rather as a tool of distributing jobs and aid. An evaluation of the USAID-funded Haitian-American Community Help Organization program noted that: “The soil conservation program was, in practice, more a hunger relief program than an agricultural development program” (Brinkerhoff, Fotzo, & Ormond, 1983, c-3). Similarly, in the early 1990s, during and after the economic and political fallout of the U.S. and a United Nations trade embargo with Haiti, job creation became a more explicit focus of USAID, which used soil conservation as a means of increasing paid work in the countryside (Brown, Deryce, Jolly, Labossière, & Yves-Francois, 1995). Other aid institutions adopted work requirements for the receipt of assistance, and distributing work took precedence over long-term conservation goals. Most residents in southwestern Haiti are now familiar with cash-for-work and can point out the sites of former soil conservation projects scattered throughout the hillsides.

In 2012, in the coastal commune of Lejè, a small foundation employed a dozen farmers to dig canals to catch descending soil and water. On a hot summer day, many of the men worked barefoot and shirtless, wielding heavy picks and shovels under the searing Caribbean sun, while the supervising agronomist stood neatly dressed under the shade of a nearby tree. Later that morning, when asked if they would ever do this work without the funding from an

NGO, two of the workers replied no, “farmers don’t do it by themselves.” Another farmer in the region said that people see this type of soil conservation project as a way to obtain money from international aid agencies, and not something they would otherwise undertake (see Brinkerhoff et al., 1983). Wages from soil conservation projects are now occasionally sources of income for farmers throughout this part of Haiti but remain limited to small cash payments for labor on other people’s land, building structures beneficiaries would not choose to build themselves (see Fig. 2).

Similar soil conservation structures were part of IHC’s integrated development project, after the 2010 earthquake in Haiti increased flows of international donations to the country. Acting as an intermediary between donors and beneficiaries, the UN coordinated and subcontracted NGOs to implement a variety of new projects. The International Relief Corps (IRC), for example, received funding from the initiative and subcontracted a small farmers’ organization in Damon called the *Asosyasyon Travayè e Kiltivatè Damon* (ATKD). ATKD was led by a charismatic President named Lebel, who himself had a long history of employment for a number of NGOs. Lebel and ATKD were tasked with building a tree nursery, a demonstration plot including soil conservation structures, and a series of ravine walls. The goal of the program was to improve environmental indicators and agricultural productivity in communes in the larger watershed. Like the soil conservation project in Lejè, ATKD’s project was designed to provide payments to local farmers. A roadside plot of privately owned and underutilized grazing land was loaned to ATKD for the project, despite the fact that its prior use for livestock grazing undermined its worth as a crop demonstration plot. However, the land was located conveniently adjacent to a roadway, making it highly visible.

For the IRC, the subcontracting NGO, the benefits of this project were recorded as improvements to area agriculture and environment. The final report, featuring a photo of Lebel and other members of ATKD in action, listed as evidence of success the numbers of persons trained in soil and water conservation, the number of demonstration plots constructed, the number of tree nurseries founded, the number of trees planted, and the meters of ravine walls built. The report thus quantified the results and highlighted “improved pastureland, erosion control, and reforestation.”

Yet in contrast to benefits claimed by this final report, Lebel, ATKD, and the residents of the community of Damon reported they did not perceive such agricultural or environmental benefits. Absent any upkeep, the agricultural demonstration plot was converted back into grazing land soon after the project ended. In 2015, just a few years later, Lebel confirmed that the material impacts of his work had largely disappeared as well: the canals dug to prevent erosion had already filled back in and had lost their structural purpose of slowing descending soil. Citing a common Haitian proverb, a resident of Damon said that building contour canals was like “washing your hands, and drying them with dirt.”<sup>4</sup>

The project paid team leaders and workers for fifteen days at a time, over the course of three months. Cash-for-work projects like ATKD’s generally paid Haiti’s minimum daily wage of 200 Haitian *Goud* (in 2012, worth approximately US\$5.00) for beneficiaries to carry out a variety of tasks: clean drainage canals, sweep streets, repair roads, or dig canals (Haiti Grassroots Watch, 2012). The three team leaders from ATKD were paid slightly more, earning 300 *Goud* each. The project leader was paid 500 *Goud* and was in charge of tracking hours and pay, submitting records to donors, and processing beneficiaries’ checks. Wages were quite good compared to the amount paid workers from other landowners, but the projects provided little long-term benefits.

<sup>4</sup> “Lave men, siye a tè.”





**Fig. 2.** Farmers in Leje, Haiti dig canals for a soil conservation project, 2012. Photo by Scott Freeman.

Lamenting the fleeting conservation benefits, Lebel said that the biggest benefit of the project had been the influx of money to ATKD's collective savings group; the small percentage collected from workers' pay still circulated among the members as rotating loans. While he was pleased at the way that ATKD had disbursed the limited monetary benefits, he found that the brief stint of wage labor did little to improve local economies. Repeatedly, he and others in the region described the salaries as "just a little bit." Other research suggests that while farmers in Haiti are eager to have wage labor opportunities, brief cash-for-work does not ameliorate conditions of poverty (Haiti Grassroots Watch, 2012; Richardson, 1997).

Lebel was also frustrated at the unequal rates of compensation between those who were designated "aid workers" and those who were "beneficiaries." For those workers labelled "beneficiaries," he argued, the pay was meager and far less than other people he knew who had salaried positions, university degrees, and recognized expertise in agronomy or agriculture: as quoted at the beginning of this article, "they pay in *Goud* for people to work with the hoe and pick. But they pay dollars for people who make the reports. This is a type of slavery!"

For Lebel, aid was marked not by programs that equalize economic status or alleviate poverty, but rather by hard work that paradoxically reproduces income inequalities. Those who administered aid programs as employees of NGOs received greater benefits than those who are the explicit "beneficiaries" (Schuller, 2009). While providing modest benefits to beneficiaries, soil conservation in the form of cash-for-work in Haiti provided greater symbolic and financial benefits for those who were in positions of relative power. The HRC and IRC, for example, claimed successes in and published reports on the implementation of these participatory local conservation projects. Those who were designated "beneficiaries" of these projects— those who worked hard to swing the picks and hoes and build soil conservation structures— were essential to the results that were subsequently claimed, counted, and published by aid organizations while the farmers, in the end, benefited relatively little.

## 6. Always beneficiaries, never employees

beneficiary  
(n.) "one who receives profits or advantages,"

...from Latin *beneficiarius* "enjoying a favor, privileged," ... from *bene-* "good, well" ... + *-ficus*, from *-ficere*, combining form of *facere* "to do, to make"<sup>5</sup>

worker

(n.) "laborer, toiler, performer, doer," agent noun from work (v.).

Over four hundred years ago, at approximately the same time as the passage of the Act for the Relief of the Poor in England, the word "beneficiary" entered the English lexicon. The "beneficiary" is the one to whom "profits" and "advantages," by this definition, are supposed to accrue. But here, beneficiaries are "toilers," "performers," and the "agents" of the work at hand. Ubah, Maryan, Lebel, and others contradict characterizations of beneficiaries as people who by definition benefit by asserting the inadequacy of the compensation for their labor, and the relative high wages of aid workers like Ali and the agronomist in Lejè. The requirements and realities of beneficiaries working for aid challenge the designation of "beneficiaries" as such. Recipients are not simply or passively "beneficiaries;" and the opposing terms "beneficiary" versus "worker" in fact describe the very same people.

Paradoxically, those who benefit the most from aid programs are not necessarily those designated "beneficiaries." Understanding aid as an unequal exchange, and not a gift, illuminates the ways in which labor value accrues within the global aid apparatus (Krause, 2014). Donors do not give funds directly to so-called beneficiaries, they provide funding to a variety of partnered and sub-contracted governmental and nongovernmental aid organizations that implement projects and importantly, provide quantifiable evidence projects' completion. In this global aid market, project reports and data are the products of aid work, the commodities that are produced and exchanged between aid agencies and donors (Carruth, 2018; Freeman & Schuller, 2020). The labor of aid participants is vital to the aid industry, even though most value accrues upward, away from participants, to governmental and nongovernmental aid agencies and global donor organizations.

Robbins (2017) argues that the term "beneficiary" should instead refer to persons in metropolitan centers and in aid organizations, who make salaries and garner professional acclaim from

<sup>5</sup> Quoted from the Online Etymology Dictionary, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/beneficiary>.

activities that require the labor of those in the global peripheries. While these individuals might bemoan global inequalities, their subject positions are nonetheless established by the privilege that accrues in part through the work of others. Although they conduct work for foreign NGOs and the Ethiopian and Haitian governments, PSNP participants and the ATKD farmers are not official employees of the aid organizations that organize and delimit their labor. These working beneficiaries do not sign legal contracts, do not have employee benefits, and are not considered “human resources,” in contrast to Ali, the agronomist, other PSNP project monitors, or consultants and policymakers at WFP, USAID, and various NGOs hired in Ethiopia or Haiti. Calling people merely “beneficiaries,” and never “workers,” much less “aid workers,” obscures the labor beneficiaries perform and the necessity of beneficiaries’ laborious participation to the functioning and justifications of contemporary aid projects.

“Beneficiary” is therefore not a universal or immutable label, but rather an unstable social category that must be discursively, symbolically, and programmatically reproduced and repeated in reference to certain individuals and groups. The “beneficiary” represents what Barchiesi (2011, 11) terms a “contested field of signification,” as donors, governments, and NGOs promote and implement their understanding of worthy labor and work ethic through aid programs, while the participants bring their own contradictory expectations of labor and aid when they enroll. Rossi (2006, 27) similarly finds, “it’s not helpful to distinguish ‘aid givers’ and ‘aid recipients’ as if they were social groups governed by different, or even incompatible logics.” Even so, the popular oppositional dichotomy of “beneficiary” versus “aid worker” is systematically normalized through hierarchical institutional and employment structures (Ong & Combinido, 2018), the grey literature of institutional reports, and aid jargon (e.g. Ministry of Agriculture, 2014). Project designs, reports, and evaluations perform valuable translation work that defines and consolidates the functions and interactions of actors (Mosse, 2005). But the ambivalent and contested subject positions of working beneficiaries are absent from these same texts and institutional forms.

The material conditions in which people labor also lend themselves to oversimplified, binary distinctions. For “beneficiaries,” labor performed outside, manually, and in the dirt, is separated from the labor of “aid workers” by the nature of the products of these forms of labor: beneficiaries modify landscapes, while aid workers write reports, calculate statistics, and publish donor appeals. Beneficiaries use shovels and picks in hot weather outdoors, while aid workers work mostly in the shade or indoors on computers and with pens and paper. Lebel lamented that those who make the reports earn more than those who “work with the pick.” As those in eastern Ethiopia and in Haiti toil—digging ditches and pulling invasive vegetation—their positions at the bottom of the hierarchical aid industry and their alienation from higher forms of professional aid work are both embodied and conferred (see Holmes, 2013). These same individuals, if they were employed inside an office building or helping to design foreign policies and aid projects therefore would be, as Mary Douglas (Douglas, 2003) might phrase it, “out of place.” Their absence and disqualification from the office buildings and professional careers in global aid thus seem natural and are not questioned even by organizations and activists championing the rights and contributions of “local” aid workers.

PSNP participants and ATKD farmers are therefore “*beneficiary-workers*,” at once signified and positioned as “beneficiaries” by others, while simultaneously conducting often unrecognized and undervalued “work” for the aid industry. Beneficiary-workers are, as Didier Fassin phrases it, “expected to show the humility of the beholden rather than express demands for rights.” (2013, 4). They are presumed to lucky to receive aid at all. Through work-for-aid projects, the aid industry and governments manage and profit from

the subjective transformation of beneficiaries into beneficiary-workers. At the same time, the signification of beneficiary-workers in reports and policies only as “beneficiaries” places them in a diminished position of power within the aid industry, relative to formally recognized aid workers. Aid relies upon and produces beneficiary-workers, but these persons are necessarily segregated and differentiated from persons officially employed within the aid industry or governmental bureaus implementing foreign-funded projects.

The attempt to discipline distant and differentiated subjects has long been part of the colonial project. Bhabha notes that “colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a *subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite*... in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess” (Bhabha 2012 [1994], 122, emphasis added). The colonial impulse to reform the Other does so by attempting to foster subjects who are similar in form to colonial power, but at the same time differentiated and inferior. These slippages—moments when binary opposition is almost complete, but not quite, or when the two binary categories are almost the same, but not quite—are key to revealing the ambiguity of whether food-for-work and cash-for-work recipients are merely passive recipients of charity or workers at the bottom rungs of the aid industry. Within a global aid system characterized by asymmetrical power relations and long histories of imperialism, beneficiaries’ work must always be differentiated from, segregated from, and made inferior to work performed by staffers, administrators, and policymakers.

Their work establishes boundaries between aid workers and aid recipients that maintains their separation. For example, Maryan, from Degago, certainly used her medical training years before with UNHCR and MSF in her informal local midwifery practice and, as described, in her efforts to patch Dayibo’s eye. If the same NGOs or the Government of Ethiopia had more fully invested in the medical training they offered Maryan years ago, she might today be a certified nurse-midwife or even a first responder. She could have been of even more assistance during this medical emergency on the PSNP project. But her daughter Ubah’s cry, “What could we do?” highlights instead the lack of power that beneficiary-workers like Maryan, Ubah, and Dayibo experience in the liminal space between being the object and subject of aid. In other words, if the labor of beneficiaries was recognized and organized differently, perhaps Maryan might today be a professional aid worker. But she is not.

To paraphrase Bhabha (2012 [1994]), Maryan remains almost a worker with rights, and almost a trained and certified professional who can effectively serve her community, but “not quite.” More broadly, food-for-work and cash-for-work programs are almost gifts, almost charitable handouts of food and cash, but not quite. They require work. And these programs are also, at the same time, almost real forms of employment and training in soil conservation, erosion control, construction, infrastructure development, or climate change mitigation, but fail to effectively or sustainably improve landscapes or economies. The PSNP in Ethiopia reports that “beneficiaries” therefore earn “wages” but are not employees. In Haiti, NGOs distribute “wages” but only to residents who are identified as part of the “target population.” Beneficiaries’ qualification for assistance necessarily then makes them ineligible for or segregated from the kinds of salaried, professional jobs recognized by labor laws and the human resource departments within governmental and international aid organizations (e.g. OCHA, 2011).

## 7. The alienation of beneficiary-workers

In both Ethiopia and Haiti, beneficiary-workers described their relationship to aid not through the passive receipt of food or cash,



but primarily through their participation in hard work and labor exchange. Beneficiary-workers recognized the injustice of their own meager “wages” compared to those of the professionals and staffers who sign employment contracts with aid organizations. They spoke of themselves not as recipients of charity but as relatively low-paid workers. When asked to calculate and compare her PSNP wages in Degago to wages paid for similar manual labor jobs nearby, Ubah declared, as already quoted, “It is not fair, how hard we work, and for what?” A year later, a Somali man echoed this sentiment after working in a nearby city for much more money, then coming home to participate in the PSNP: “they pay us too little for this work.”

The labor of beneficiary-workers contributes to only marginal improvements in people’s income, that then, through the labor of the employees of NGOs and government bureaucracies, is amplified and transformed into even more valuable data collection schemes, project reports, donor appeals, and stories and images of successful interventions (see examples of this phenomenon in Freeman & Schuller, 2020). The labor of beneficiaries at the very bottom of the global aid industry – so often elided from the benefits of employment – thus enables the upwards stratification of better-recognized and better-compensated forms of labor observed by others in the contemporary global aid industry (Krause, 2014; Swidler & Watkins, 2009). In the Somali Region of Ethiopia, PSNP beneficiary-workers pull out invasive trees, and afterwards the salaried PSNP monitor employed by the regional agricultural bureau provides statistics about the number of plants extracted, the number of participants enrolled, and the approval of local governmental committees for the projects at hand. These numbers and approvals are subsequently converted into statistics, summarized in annual reports, and included in donor appeals for future funding. Similarly, in Haiti, aid workers from IRC and IHC praised the farmers’ association for the work completed. Stories and pictures of the plants planted and the canals dug were used to produce value through reports and publications necessary for the IRC and the UN to legitimize current funding and appeal for future funding. Yet all this production resulted in no additional benefits for ATKD farmers in the years after the original project. Within both of these two systems, beneficiary-workers do not receive aid as a gift, but rather they labor for meager and short-lived resources under unequal and precarious relationships of global exchange.

Marx’s ideas about the alienation of labor refers in part to alienation from both the products of labor as well as the act of labor itself (Marx, 1844). In Ethiopia and Haiti, individuals referred to themselves as active subjects of within global aid programs but divorced from most of the value produced by their labor. Lebel’s image was emblazoned in the IRC report, but he stated that he received no salary or promotion for his contribution to the project, nor did ATKD members receive additional benefits because of the success of the report documenting their work. Statistics and reports remain available only to the personnel of the aid organizations who organize the projects. Documents and data reside either printed out and collated in three-ring binders, locked away in filing cabinets, or on password-protected databases, in buildings or computers hundreds of kilometers away from where beneficiary-workers labor. Even Ali, the PSNP organizer working near Degago, could not access the electronic files where the numbers he reported upwards to his supervisor were finally assembled and stored.

Beneficiary-workers are not only alienated from the products of the labor, but the act of labor itself: they complete tasks that are of no interest outside their immediate need for income. Food- and cash-for-work activities are designed without their input and decided prior to their enrollment. In Haiti, farmers are so disinterested in these sorts of soil conservation structures that they do not

build them without cash incentives. In Ethiopia, participants in the PSNP testified they would never work for such low wages if there were other jobs nearby—and indeed, many Somalis expressed a desire to migrate elsewhere in search of better work. Furthermore, the nature of their project to pull out the thorny invasive *Prosopis* trees planted years ago by UNHCR highlights the futility and absurdity of so many episodic foreign aid interventions (see also Little, 2008). This miserable type of work is paradigmatic of wage labor, whose “alien character emerges clearly in the fact that as soon as no physical or other compulsion exists, labor is shunned like the plague” (Marx, 1844).

## 8. Conclusions

Beneficiary-workers’ labor is vital to the production and justification of aid around the world – in wealthy and low-income countries, and as part of domestic and foreign interventions. The labor of persons classed in the English language as “beneficiaries” demonstrates their deservingness for assistance and similarly, produces the aid industry as the benevolent benefactor of labor opportunities. But like similar poverty alleviation projects located in donor countries, the most valuable products of beneficiary-workers’ labor are not improvements to landscapes or contributions to developing economies, but rather to transformations in participants’ subjective positions vis-à-vis the aid industry—from “sturdy beggars” into beneficiary-workers. These transformations are rendered valuable only through aid workers’ visual, public, and quantitative forms of representation and reporting, and not through the labor of beneficiary-workers in and of itself. Beneficiary-workers’ labor remains fodder for creating the datasets, publications, and evaluations that aid organizations now require. Although beneficiary-workers literally get their hands dirty, and embody and perform the work required, they are also at the same time alienated from these most valuable products of their labor.

Beneficiary-workers are therefore almost the passive objects of charity, but recalling Bhabha’s phrasing, “not quite.” Our interlocutors instead characterized themselves “workers” earning wages. They represent the lowest rungs of a remarkably hierarchical and inequitable global aid industry that requires the participation but never the true employment or empowerment of the poor. At the same time, the continual signification of beneficiary-workers as merely “beneficiaries” indexes their potential delinquency and dependency on aid, it presumes the benevolence and righteousness of donors and aid agencies who intervene, and it makes Ubah and Lebel and other beneficiary-workers who dare to question this system seem ungrateful. This linguistic move further stymies potential reforms to the aid industry that would enable beneficiary-workers to negotiate the terms of their labor, and allow them to seek recourse for exploitation or injury.

Beneficiary-workers like Ubah and Lebel are well aware of these contradictions, and their articulations of this system of aid as “not fair” and like “slavery!” counter assumptions that the poor are ignorant of their subject positions. Not only are they aware of their subject positions, they are also aware of the ways in which their own work benefits aid workers and helps produce the aid industry, while doing little to improve their own circumstances. Beneficiary-workers despise and deride the absurdity of this work for work’s sake. Consequently, beneficiary-workers in Ethiopia and Haiti continue to enroll in menial work-for-aid schemes, but also hustle for and dream of better alternatives.

Critics have long argued that the poor are in their position because of their failure to “pull themselves up by their bootstraps,” as the saying goes, and not a result of ineffective poverty alleviation or development policies (Katz, 1995; Quigley, 1998). Poverty

is assumed to reflect a lack of work ethic, and not necessarily a lack of work. Thus while canals dug in Haiti fill in with soil after two years, and invasive trees in Ethiopia return with the next erosion control project, these do not represent failures. Transformations of the land are not these projects' main objectives. Instead, like the English Poor Laws, workhouses and labor programs throughout England and the British colonies, workfare in the 20th century, and even welfare work requirements in the contemporary United States, the fundamental objectives of food-for-work and cash-for-work include the discursive, programmatic, and bodily enforcement of what it means to be a hard-working, and thus deserving beneficiary. And at the same time, by rendering the conditions in which people fulfill these difficult and dangerous labor requirements invisible, and by rendering participants always "beneficiaries" and nothing more, datasets and publications produced by the aid industry convey the false impression that the poor are being rescued, once again, by the benevolence of others, and not by the dint of their own hard work.

### CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Lauren Carruth:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Writing - original draft, and Writing - review & editing. **Scott Freeman:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Writing - original draft, and Writing - review & editing.

### Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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