Centering Women's Voices: Global Aid and Local Realities of Obstetric Fistula in Uganda

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Within the Western-dominated international health care system, the experiences of women in the Global South are often overlooked, ignored, dismissed, and deprioritized. Medical issues such as obstetric fistula—ones that can be prevented, yet continue to afflict millions of women worldwide—exemplify this cruel reality of structural inequity. Over four months of ethnographic fieldwork in Geneva, Switzerland and Iganga, Uganda, I explore the disparity in understandings of fistula between levels of power and proximity, moving from local realities in Iganga to international perspectives in Geneva. From community care to international policy work, I investigate how these differences in perception affect the aid and care offered to Ugandan women and how the voices of former fistula patients are often left out of decision-making processes. Throughout the paper, I comparatively analyze perspectives, weaving through incongruent narratives of traditional and clinical care, stigma, unsustainable aid structures, and women's needs. At its core, this project seeks to contribute to scholarship on global health and development work by uplifting and giving space to voices that are too often marginalized within international work. Through centering women's voices, policymakers can come to understand authentic needs and how best to strengthen humanitarian health aid.