

## Severe Poverty as a Human Rights Violation

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### **Abstract:**

We citizens of the affluent countries tend to discuss our obligations toward the distant needy in terms of donations and transfers, assistance and redistribution: "How much of our wealth, if any, should we give away to the hungry abroad?" This way of conceiving the problem is a serious moral error, and a very costly one for the global poor. It depends on the false belief - widespread in the rich countries - that the causes of the persistence of severe poverty are wholly indigenous to the countries in which it occurs. There are indeed national and local factors that contribute to persistent poverty in developing countries. But global institutional rules also play an important role in its reproduction, in part by sustaining the national and local factors that affluent Westerners most like to blame for the problem. Since these rules are shaped by our governments, in our name, we bear moral responsibility not merely by assisting the distant poor too little, but also, and more significantly, by harming them too much.