The morally defensible allocation of foreign aid: How to assist developing countries while enhancing self-sufficiency, agency, and improved power structures

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Introduction

• Can aid relieve poverty and generate prosperity?
  • Some say no, let’s abandon the practice

• Do developed countries have a moral imperative to supply foreign aid?
  • If yes, when? How can aid be delivered in an ethical manner?
Overview

1. Criticism of foreign aid
2. Is aid morally defensible: A review of philosophical literature
3. How to administer aid in a way that is morally defensible
Criticism of foreign aid
Dambisa Moyo

Foreign aid:

- Fosters corruption
- Creates dependency
- Generates economic challenges
  - Inflation
  - Hurts export sector
  - Lower savings rates
  - Corruption leads to lower investment rates
Roger Riddell and Homi Kharas

- Volatility of aid giving
- Fragmentation of objectives
- Ineffectiveness
China has become a major donor of aid to Africa

Deborah Brautigam claims China’s aid program:
• Lacks transparency
• Empowered undemocratic regimes

Roudabeh Kishi and Clionadh Raleigh claim:
• Chinese financial assistance is linked to increased political violence among African states
Is aid morally defensible?
A review of philosophical literature
Alleviate suffering & rectify past wrongs

- Peter Singer: Wealthy should forfeit extra income so others can enjoy adequate standard of living
  - Suffering is bad, so if it is in our power to alleviate it, we have a moral obligation to donate

- Thomas Pogge: Rich have “positive moral duties” to help the impoverished & “negative moral duties” to lessen problems they have caused
  - Rich have constructed a global order that promotes their interests at the expense of the poor
The moral responsibility to assist those beyond state borders

- Cosmopolitans: when dealing with distributive justice, people do not have higher obligations to their compatriots
  - Freedom and equality should extend to all humanity, not just those born into privileged states
  - Prioritizing compatriots suggests a “patriotic bias” (Stilz, 2009)
The moral responsibility to assist those beyond state borders

- Martha Nussbaum: Privileges of citizenship are akin to feudal privilege of pre-modern times

- Mathias Risse: Distributive justice should not be limited to those with whom we share state borders
  - Wealthy states could do more to help poor states because all individuals possess a good that warrants respect
The counterargument: moral responsibility to countrymen

- Anna Stilz challenges cosmopolitan attitude towards states; We have civic responsibilities to our state if it is just and constitutionally protects justice

- Liberal nationalists: Cultural characteristics, geography, and a shared language warrant our allegiance to a state
  - Shared national identities shape redistributive justice obligations
## Reconciliation of competing viewpoints

- Appeal of Stilz’s argument, but some states cannot or do not protect justice and/or equality for all.

- John Rawls: impoverished should receive assistance until they can care for themselves and develop well-ordered societies.
  - Justice’s primary duty is to give political communities an opportunity to realize self-sufficiency and equality.
Moral defensibility of foreign aid

• Need to help those in states that cannot help their own citizens

• Nussbaum maintains that we must protect rights, dignities, and capabilities of all people, even those in failing states
  • If human beings are more or less equal in power and capacity, then it is arbitrary for some to be given vastly greater authority and opportunity
Ethical aid practices
Foreign aid that enhances self-sufficiency and agency

- Failure to involve recipients in development processes can create dependency
- Must empower recipients and provide them with the resources needed to fulfill their human capabilities
- Potential resolutions:
  - Projects that support community decision making
  - Microloans and micro-franchises that allow the poor to start their own businesses
Foreign aid that supports improved power structures

- Aid schemes must not provide violent and unjust dictators with opportunities to swindle more wealth
  - Ensure that aid and FDI do not enhance dictatorial power structures

- Aid recipients must become empowered so they can make their own political and economic choices
Summary

• Foreign aid initiatives criticized for exacerbating dependency, corruption, and disempowerment of the poor

• Reconciliation of competing viewpoints highlights obligation to support poor states until they can become self-sufficient and just

• Recommended aid initiatives foster recipients’ self-sufficiency, agency, and the redistribution of power