

The Limits of Charity: Advancing a Rights-based Justice Model to Remedy Poverty and Hunger

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Abstract : In 1995, the World Health Organization declared that poverty was the biggest killer and the greatest cause of suffering in the world. Income is certainly a key social determinant of health, the lack of which causes innumerable health and mental health conditions. In seeking to provide relief from financial hardship for residents within their populace, states in the Global North have largely turned to the non-profit and charitable sector. The stigma and shame of accessing charity is a significant barrier for many, but what is more problematic is that the embrace of the charitable model has let governments off the hook from responding to their international human rights obligations. Although states are signatories to various human rights treaties and conventions internationally, many of these laws have not been implemented domestically. This presentation explores the limits of the charitable model in addressing poverty in countries of the Global North. Unlike in the ages passed, when poverty was thought to be an individual problem, we now know that poverty is largely systemic in nature. In this presentation, we will identify the structural determinants of poverty, outline why people are reticent to access charitable programs and services and how income security is reproduced through the charitable model, and discuss evidence-informed solutions, such as a basic income guarantee, to move beyond the charitable model in favour of a rights-based justice model. To move beyond charity, we must demand that governments recognize our fundamental human rights and address poverty and hunger using a justice model based on substantive human rights.

Keywords : basic income, charity, poverty, income security, hunger, food security, social justice, human rights

Conference Title : ICPSP 2023 : International Conference on Poverty and Social Protection

Conference Location : Athens, Greece

Conference Dates : October 16-17, 2023