

Business Ethics and Governance

Are the rich people in society obligated to help the poor?

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Should the rich in society be obligated to help the poor?

Introduction:

According to the oxford dictionary, it is a predisposition of having a great deal of finances or assets. In light of this, one (person/country/society) can be considered to be rich if he/she has a lot of possessions and property (Freier, 2007). In this context, property is the presence of a lot of valuable resources, material possessions and/or the control of such property.

The poor on the other hand refers to the hapless individuals in society that deserve pity. Such people are considered miserable victims who cannot help themselves. According to the oxford dictionary, they are people that lack sufficient finances to live on at a considered standard comfort or normal life in a society (Jacobson, 2008).

Given that millions of people still live in and with poverty, and in many societies/countries/places, the gap between poor and rich has kept on widening there is need to help the poor. At the same time, there're is an unprecedented wealth and technological capabilities accumulation by affluent people in different countries (Pablo, 2007). However, many other people argue otherwise; that there is no need to help the poor.

Theories that explain the poverty causes forms the foundation upon which the poor can be helped and strategies on poverty reduction can be based. Theories behind poverty in the third world nations put a lot of emphasis on characteristics related to culture as a basis for development (Rank, Yoon, & Hirschl, 2003). However, there are theories that focus on political and social aspects which perpetuate poverty.

The theory explaining poverty as a personal failing states that an individual is poor because of personal characteristics/traits. These characteristics in turn cause that individual to fail. Supposed traits include personality characteristics, such as low educational levels,

laziness among others. Notwithstanding this range, poverty is seen as the individual's own failure not to rise out of poverty (Rank, Yoon, & Hirschl, 2003).

Another theory views poverty as a structural failure. This argument is contrary to the first theory which states that personal failing is the sole cause of poverty. It argues that the failing at the structural level including economic and social structural failing contribute immensely to poverty. The first of these failures is the failure of the job market in providing adequate job size that pay enough to people to keep their families away from poverty (Rank, Yoon, & Hirschl, 2003). Based on this theories, individuals, the rich and the poor, can find out whether to help the poor or not.

Problem statement

There has been a lot of debate as to whether poor people should be helped and if so, whether the rich people/nations/societies should be obligated to help them. Well, different people may have different arguments about it. Some may say that if rich people can reach out to the poor and unfortunate ones, then the world is likely to be made a better place.

Some others may also argue that they feel satisfied if they offer the poor their best or if they make charitable donations to the deserving and needy. Further, they can argue that there are many individuals in the world that are rich and can share their riches with those that are unfortunate that have not been able to get out of poverty (Jacobson, 2008). The argument therefore is subjective.

Equally, there are numerous reasons for helping the poor in the society. First in the list are the humanitarian reasons. Similar to individuals that give to charity, many societies/countries/people feel it is their social, religious, and moral duty to help unfortunate people in other societies/countries who may be suffering from such unfortunate scenarios as disease, war, drought, or famine. However, many rich people/nations/societies also give money for other reasons such as to be identified as sole

helpers, diplomatic reasons, political reasons, etc. Some want to maintain a dependency relationship with the recipient of their aid, or to influence the society/government on the direction of their development (Freier, 2007a). Another reason as to why many other people help poorer ones is for economic reasons. They may want to control the supply of materials/goods and services from their recipients.

In my view, there are many other important ways through which the rich can help the poor and in so doing, help alleviate poverty from their recipients in future. These ways include:

- Help in educating poor people's children. Stop these children from doing work/offering cheap unskilled labour instead of going to school.
- Offer the poor with sustainable aid. For instance, offer them with fertilizers and other planting inputs. Generally, offer them what will help them generate more income to sustain them. Those that are skilled should be offered opportunities to exploit their skills and so earn and sustain themselves.
- Offer emergency assistance such as medication and treatment.

The Case

Martin Otworu is an Information Technology Consultant in Nairobi. He was born 28 years ago, a second born to a divorced mother. He therefore never knew who his father was. Three years later, his mother left for the city to look for a job (and a better husband) to enable her get money and capability of taking care of her children.

When Martin was four years old, his mother got married again to another man and two years later, they brought in Martin from his uncle to stay with them. When time came for him to go to school, his foster father was uncommitted to paying his school fees. Nevertheless, his mother took him to one of the public school near where they were staying.

When Martin got to standard Six, his foster father took him to stay with his mother (a foster grandmother to Martin) and stayed there for two years without going to school. A Good Samaritan (a pastor in the nearby church) took Martin to school and enrolled him under his name in class six. Two years later, Martin sat for his Kenya certificate of Primary Education which he passed very well and got an admission to a provincial high school.

His foster father could not hear anything like paying school fees for Martin. His (father) relatives also did not accept Martin and could not support him. One day, his mother's system offered to educate him. She enrolled him in one of the day schools in her area but a year later, she got tired and sent him parking. However, Martin got accommodation from one his teachers who also paid fees for him. Martin completed high school education and passed well. He later won a scholarship to study at Strathmore University's undergraduate degree and later completed his Masters in Information Technology from the same university. By God's, Martin has been blessed and he is a Rich man (at least by the standards of his village). He owns a number of properties and generally lives well.

A few years ago, Martin was confronted by one of his village men who requested (inform of a demand) that Martin should help the poor in his village. The elder told him that it is not only prudent that he gets to help the needy in his village but also mandatory because he (Martin) benefited from that community and so they have the right to benefit from him as well. The elder argued that if they never allowed his foster father to marry martin's mother (with two children), then Martin could not be anywhere near the property he owns.

His mother together with his foster father later continued to sire up to six children. Recently, his foster father demanded that Martin Builds a house for him, give him a stipend every month, employ a cowboy and a helper for them (the foster father and Martin's mother), pay school fees for his siblings, and help his foster father's relatives among others. Martin offered to meet his siblings' school fees and built a house for his parents. His father never says that Martin had done anything. He demanded

more. There was building pressure from not only his family but village elders as well who demanded that poor people in his village deserved to be helped by Martin.

Martin rejected the rest of the demands, though he helped a number of people not only from his village but from other parts of the country as well. He is currently faced with a dilemma: Is He obliged to help the poor? If he doesn't, what is so wrong about it? Is there any immorality about his refusal?

Martin believes that everybody was created by God, and so was given the body and the soul which carries with it the intellect and the will. People are meant therefore to use their intellects to think straight, choose well and advance their lives. He believes that God created all humanity equal and gave them equal opportunities. He did not intend to give others better opportunity and deny others so that those with better opportunities can help those who cannot make it in life. His conviction is hinged on the fact that we all are free mortals and we advance our lives based on the effort, the decisions that we make as well as the persistence that we put towards a certain achievement. He therefore is convinced that if all people work hard and exert more effort and persistence, no one will ever be poor. So the rich are not obliged to help the poor.

In Kenya, many poor people always complain whenever they are not granted the favour they seek from those that they perceive to be rich. Many relatives to Mr Otworu always complain that He is not helping them and according to their perception, it is his duty to support them. Just recently, he saw this young lady about fourteen years old coming up to him in Nairobi town and asked him, "tafadhali ninunulie chai" (Please by me tea). Looking at that girl closely, one could tell that she is not just desperate but negligent by herself and by her parent. There was this lady who stood by and by all standars she seemed to know this young girl. Otworu responded to her, "Pole. Sina pesa tafadhali" (Sorry, I do not have money please) The girl suddenly became unhappy and started shouting at him. She seemed to demand his lending hand. Otworu felt embarrassed but held on liking at the girl. She

continued complaining and shouting, “watu mna pesa lakini hamtusaidii. Si hiyo pesa ni yetu?” (You people have money but you are not helping us. Isn't that money ours?)

Otwori wondered to himself as to whether he is obligated to help the poor with whom he comes across. If he doesn't, what is wrong about it? Is there any moral explanation as to why or why not help the poor?

Ethical problem

Should we force rich people into helping the poor? Of course no! The initiation of such an aggression not only violates the rights of the rich but also violate the reason why there should be state intervention in any economy as well as the role of man in his own life. This is mainly because it is relatively impossible to determine interpersonal utility and it is hard to take something from one individual and give it to another individual and then assume that it is a net gain(Pablo, 2007).

Based on the things that we have learnt in class, there is no framework that can be used to analyze this case. The case can neither fit into the stakeholder theory, stewardship theory nor shareholder theory. However, we can analyze it base on morality, virtues, common good, fiduciaries, duty of man towards a neighbour and covetousness and envy.

It is true that every human being has a duty to his neighbour. Such duty includes support and respect. For a Christian, the bible says that Christ wants us to help one another whenever in need. However, it does not say that it is a must that one has to do that. We therefore, though not forcefully, have a duty towards our neighbours and so the rich should help the poor (Freier, 2007b).

If the poor demands that the rich should help them are they working as God demands? God demands that people should earn from their sweat. Both the rich and the poor should work and earn a living. This is a demand from God after we sinned against him. Based on this then, the rich can help but not to an extent of making the poor lazy. Each one of use must work and therefore Mr Otwor should insist on that to his people and the other poor that he meets. However, he has to help them

especially on critical issues such as medication. The poor should also be aware of the consequences of covetousness and envy. God dejects such. In fact commandment number nine prohibits people from coveting their neighbour's property.

It is the duty of people to respect life. The rich should not watch the poor die of hunger just because they did not work hard. They should help in the preservation of life at all times. However, being rich does not offer you any fiduciary duty towards the poor. Not unless you have something in common with them such as leadership. In such a situation as Mr Otworis, there is no fiduciary towards the poor and therefore helping them is not his duty. It can only be a helping hand to them.

Finally, based on the virtues, helping the poor is considered a virtue as opposed to not helping them. Therefore, the rich can help the poor to exercise this virtue towards the poor.

In summary, it is not a must that the rich helps the poor, but it is virtuous to do so. By doing so, the rich promotes respect to life, enhances the morality of human acts, promotes the duty towards neighbours, facilitates human rights and promotes the morality of human acts. By helping the poor, the rich participates in fulfilling God's demand to Christians that people should help their neighbours whenever they are in need such as sickness, hunger, lack of shelter, etc.

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