

Why does extreme poverty persist in India?

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2014-1-31

At a recent lecture at LSE, Professor Amartya Sen explored the persistence of extreme poverty and tackled some of the moral and economic challenges anti-poverty campaigners face.

Delivering the Prospect/Joseph Rowntree Foundation [anti-poverty lecture](#), Professor Sen suggested that there are common justifications for the persistence of extreme poverty. These include the argument that people are ignorant of the scale of poverty, the sense that poverty is an intractable problem, and the view that humans are inherently self-centred. He also pointed out that the practice of blaming victims of poverty for their predicament is rampant.



Arguing that the tolerance of poverty was itself intolerable, Sen countered these justifications by using examples from India. He pointed out that the extreme poverty of many Indians is rarely portrayed or debated in the country's vibrant media. The focus on India's large – and growing – middle class, both by policymakers and the media, also distracts from measures to reduce poverty. Sen said that per capita income in India has quadrupled since the country's independence in 1947, and that the lack of adequate healthcare and education facilities has contributed as much to Indian poverty as low income.

Sen argued that India was losing out by failing to use the gains from its recent economic growth to reduce poverty in a targeted fashion. For him, equitable economic growth is the most effective way to combat persistent poverty.

Click [here](#) to hear the complete lecture, "Poverty and the Tolerance of the Intolerable".

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