



# Poverty and Human Rights: Sen's 'Capability Perspective' Explored

*Polly Vizard*



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'Poverty itself is a violation of numerous basic human rights.' (Mary Robinson, former UN High Commissioner on Human Rights)

The idea that freedom from poverty is a basic human right that gives rise to moral and legal obligations of governments and other actors has received increased international attention in recent years. Mary Robinson, the former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, has pushed the international agenda on poverty and human rights forward by characterizing extreme poverty as one of the key human rights problems that the world faces. The recognition of poverty as a human rights issue is also increasingly reflected in the work of international organizations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and of campaigning organizations such as Oxfam, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International.

In *Poverty and Human Rights* Vizard analyses the importance of the work of the Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen for contemporary debates about poverty and human rights. Bringing together perspectives from ethics, economics, and international law, Vizard provides a detailed and concise analysis of Sen's contributions and examines the ways in which his work has promoted cross-fertilization and integration across traditional disciplinary divides. She demonstrates that Sen has made a major contribution to the development of an 'interdisciplinary bridge' between human rights and theoretical and empirical economics, and to the establishment of poverty as a human rights issue.

Vizard demonstrates that Sen's work has deepened and expanded human rights discourse in important and influential ways. In ethics, Sen is shown to have challenged the exclusion of poverty, hunger, and starvation from the characterization of fundamental freedoms and human rights, and to have contributed to the development of a framework in which authoritatively recognized international standards in this field can be meaningfully conceptualized and coherently understood. In economics, Sen is shown to have set out a far-reaching critique of standard frameworks that fail to take account of fundamental freedoms and human rights, and to have moved the economics and human rights agenda forward by pioneering the development of new paradigms and approaches which focus on these concerns.



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