

**Remarks by Ambassador Asoke Kumar Mukerji, Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations at Launch Event of "Humanity Divided: Confronting Inequality in Developing Countries" on January 29, 2014**

Let me begin by thanking the Bureau for Development Policy and Poverty Practice of UNDP for inviting me to this launch event.

2. I must compliment Administrator Helen Clarke for her extremely pertinent remarks, especially as the UN Development System tackles the problem of rising inequality in developing countries.

3. I must also congratulate the authors of the publication : "**Humanity Divided: Confronting Inequality in Developing Countries**", especially Selim Jahan, Magdy Martinez-Soliman and Anuradha Seth for their stellar effort in putting together a very comprehensive and well argued case for tackling the challenge of rising inequalities in developing countries.

4. The publication is one of the most exhaustive and indepth analysis of the nature of inequality that developing countries are grappling with, including not just income inequalities, or the inequalities of opportunity, but also disparities in education, health and nutrition, gender inequality and how these impact on the perspective of policy makers in varying country contexts.

5. The basic premise and summary of the document illustrates that in spite of the civilisational strides that humanity has made in several decades, the gap between the haves and the have nots continues to become starker and deeper.

6. Since I have been asked to share my country's perspective on this challenge and how the Government of India has gone about in tackling this, let me very briefly cite two recent examples from our own experience. Before I do so, I would recapitulate for you that the problems of poverty and inequality faced in India, in terms of sheer numbers, are enormous. India, which consistently clocked 8% growth rates of GDP between 2009 and 2012, is a member of the G-20, and a trillion dollar economy with the services industry driving the thrust of our economic boom. At the same time, India today has more poor people living in extreme poverty than in any other country in the world. There are more than 300 million, a third of our population of a billion plus people, who fend for themselves at less than 50 cents a day.

7. Confronting such a challenge, the Government of India has in the last decade introduced and implemented a series of measures, which have been critical in not just tackling the problem of poverty, or joblessness, but also in bridging the inequalities between rural and urban India.

8. On August 25, 2005, the Indian Parliament enacted a law guaranteeing the right of rural households to a minimum of 100 days of work a year, a legislation

which later came to be known as the MNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act), a milestone in social policy and employment creation. Its rights based approach, social inclusion features, reliance on local self government, and focus on livelihood security made it a very important public endeavour, more so when it had no precedent of its kind, nationally or internationally.

9. The Act mandated the implementation of an ambitious, demand driven employment creation programme, aiming to benefit the rural poor with an income provided by jobs paying a socially acceptable wage, and with projects to improve productivity in agriculture and alleviate land degradation. It also set important social goals, such as empowering women and widening opportunities for marginalised population groups - themes that find a lot of value these days in the UN development discourse!

10. As the Act was implemented, and began to revamp prior employment programmes, job creation accelerated from less than 1 billion work days distributed among 20 million households in the Act's first year of operation, 2006-07, **to 2.5 billion workdays for 50 million households in 2010-11!**

11. As a supplement to this major initiative, another one of its kind project that was launched, and quite unique in a developing country context, was the AADHAR project. This is an attempt to create an ID for each of the 1.2 billion strong population in India. Launched in 2010, to ensure a "unique identity" for each inhabitant by basing it on biometric and other data, it aimed to deliver better public services directly to its end recipient, and cut out all the bureaucratic chains and leakages in one stroke. Since barely a million Indians enrolled in the first one year, the project was losing steam and being labeled 'unrealistic' in the Indian setting. However, today the project is about to enroll half of 1.2 billion population in India.

12. With the subsequent launch of the Direct Benefit Transfer or Direct Cash Transfers programme on 1st January 2013, and the seeding of bank accounts using this very Unique ID project, more than a million beneficiaries of government programmes have already directly received their benefits into their bank accounts.

13. I have cited these two examples to illustrate that the Indian experience adapts new tools made available to us by technology to meet the objectives enshrined in our Constitution, especially directed to remove poverty and inequality. Though we still have a long way to go, both these schemes have been pivotal in changing the development discourse, especially of rural empowerment in India.

14. Before concluding, I would like to mention that in our experience, and given the enormity of challenges facing us, we cannot afford the luxury of debating sophisticated alternative options to target poverty and inequality. Our needs are immediate, and grow every passing minute. We are glad that Para-73

of UNDP's QCPR Resolution focuses on capacity building, employment generation, education, vocational training, rural development, and the mobilization of all possible resources among others which aim at achieving poverty eradication. In our view, these would be the tools of first choice to address the challenges confronting us.

15. I would also like to point out that the issue of inequality within countries cannot be addressed meaningfully without also simultaneously addressing the issue of inequality between countries, which tends to exacerbate inequalities within countries.

16. The lens of climate change and sustainable development is important, but need not **necessarily be our options of first choice** in our multi dimensional approach to tackling poverty and rising inequalities, more so when these problems confront us so starkly on a daily basis. This is not at all to belittle or say that 'holistic approaches' don't work, but simply to emphasize that we do need to get our priorities right. In this context, it would be important to keep in mind the mandate of the Rio+20 Conference, where our leaders affirmed unambiguously that as the greatest global challenge poverty eradication is an indispensable requirement for sustainable development. This mandate from our leaders needs to be the lodestar to guide our efforts.

16. I hope that as we deliberate further addressing the challenges of "Humanity Divided" today, we can also factor in this approach in our collective quest to bridge this issue.

I thank you and wish the publication all success!

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