

PART ONE

INTRODUCTION

THE UNEQUAL WORLD

Massive poverty and obscene inequality are such terrible scourges of our times – times in which the world boasts breathtaking advances in science, technology, industry, and wealth accumulation – that they have to rank alongside slavery and apartheid as social evils.

(Nelson Mandela, London, 2005)

From cradle to grave, a person's life chances are dominated by the extraordinary levels of inequality that characterise the modern world. A girl born in Norway will almost certainly live to old age.¹ If she is born in Sierra Leone, however, she has a one in four chance of dying before her fifth birthday. A Norwegian girl can expect to go to a good school, followed by university, and to be healthy and cared for right through to old age. In Sierra Leone only two in three girls start school at all, and many drop out along the way, deterred by having to find 'user fees' levied by the school or by the low standards of education, or forced to stay home to care for their brothers and sisters, or to go out to work to feed the family. Only one in four women is able to read and write. University is an impossible dream.

The extent of global inequality is breathtaking. The income of the world's 500 richest billionaires exceeds that of its poorest 416 million people.² Every three minutes, somewhere in the developing world, two women die needlessly in childbirth or pregnancy,³ and over 40 children are killed by avoidable diseases such as diarrhoea or malaria.⁴ Governments spend least on health care where the need is the greatest.⁵

Ending inequality's 'lottery by birth' is perhaps the greatest global challenge of the twenty-first century. And it is one that concerns all nations, since in a globalised world, poverty and suffering do not remain confined within borders, but spill over in the form of conflict, migration, and environmental degradation.

The world as a whole is far more unequal than any single country. Such grotesque unfairness would probably precipitate social and political meltdown were it to occur within a single country. One consequence of globalisation is that the world is increasingly coming to resemble just that: a single community bound together by ever-improving transportation and communications links. The political price of continued inequality can only rise.

According to a calculation by Oxfam based on income distribution data held by the World Bank, if global inequality could be reduced to even that of

FROM POVERTY TO POWER

Haiti (one of the most unequal countries in the world), the number of people living under \$1 a day poverty would be halved to 490 million. Go further, and achieve a distribution of income of a middle-ranking country (in terms of inequality), say Costa Rica, and \$1 a day poverty falls to 190 million – a fifth of the current total.

Even within countries, inequalities are grotesque across the whole spectrum of life chances. Children born into the poorest 20 per cent of households in Ghana or Senegal are two to three times more likely to die before the age of five than children born into the richest 20 per cent of households. In the UK, the government's Scientific Reference Group on Health Inequalities found that life expectancy in the country's wealthiest areas is seven to eight years longer than in the poorest areas.⁶

Inequality compounds, and often stems from, discrimination based on gender, race, or caste. Black Brazilians are twice as likely as whites to die a violent death, and are only one-third as likely to go to university.⁷ In Guatemala, the number of children of European descent dying before they reach their fifth birthday is 56 in every 1,000, compared with 79 of every 1,000 indigenous children. In the Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, primary school enrolment for scheduled caste and scheduled tribe girls is 37 per cent, compared with 60 per cent for girls from non-scheduled castes.⁸ Among boys from non-scheduled castes, 77 per cent are enrolled.⁹

For poor people, such inequalities cancel out the benefits of living in a better-off society. Here too, rich countries have nothing to brag about. The infant mortality rate among indigenous Canadians is, on average, two to three times the national rate, and the average indigenous person will die 20 years earlier than the average Canadian.¹⁰

Middle-income countries appear the most unequal. Gini index trends show that Eastern Europe/former Soviet Union and Asia had the largest increases in inequality between 1990 and 2008. Inequality in India has doubled in the last 20 years.¹¹ Latin America remains the region with the highest level of income inequality, although the region is marked by significant improvement since 2000. Low-income countries show mixed results; sub-Saharan Africa is highly unequal but appears to have reduced its Gini index by almost five points, on average, since 1990.¹²

Nowhere is the injustice of inequality more evident than in the phenomenon of 'missing women'. Due to discrimination, the world's female population is lower than it should be compared with males; discrimination starts even before birth through selective abortion and then continues as girl children's nutrition and health care are neglected compared with their brothers'. Recent estimates put the number of missing women at 101.3 million – more than the total number of people killed in all the wars of the bloody twentieth century. Eighty million of these are Indian or Chinese: a staggering 6.7 and 7.9 per cent of the expected female populations of China and India respectively.¹³

One little recognised, but crucial facet of inequality is in access to quality essential services. Education and health care are available in two forms within India: better-quality, state-of-the-art services for a few contrasts with a dilapidated, low-quality service shorn of all dignity for the majority of the poor.

WHY INEQUALITY MATTERS¹⁴

Oxfam and other NGOs have long highlighted the moral repugnance of the world's yawning social and economic divides. There is something deeply unjust about a system that allows 850 million people to go hungry, while an epidemic of obesity blights millions of lives in rich countries (and increasingly, in cities in developing countries). A new word, 'globesity', has even been coined to describe this global phenomenon.

Extreme inequality provokes outrage and condemnation, because it violates the widely held notion that all people, wherever they are, enjoy certain basic rights. Addressing inequality is essential if countries are to live up to their obligations under the international human rights framework established by the UN, to guarantee equal civil and political rights and to pursue the 'progressive realisation' of economic, social, and cultural rights.¹⁵

Yet inequality and redistribution have been out of fashion with rich country decision-makers for many years and warrant barely a mention in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which emerged during the course of the 1990s.¹⁶ In sway to the Washington Consensus view that 'a rising tide lifts all boats', rich country leaders believed that economic growth alone would be enough to address poverty. By 2005, the manifest failure of that approach prompted a rash of high-profile publications from the World Bank, and the UN argued that tackling inequality is one of the most urgent tasks of our time.¹⁷

Academics used to stress the positive potential for inequality to reward 'wealth creators' and so encourage innovation. Now economists argue that it is *equality* that is good for growth, and makes it more effective at reducing poverty.

Inequality wastes talent. If women are excluded from top jobs, half the talent of any nation is squandered. By one estimate, if all states in India were to perform as well as the best (Karnataka) in eradicating gender discrimination in the workplace, national output would increase by a third.¹⁸ When banks refuse to lend to poor people, good economic opportunities are wasted.

Inequality undermines society and its institutions. In an unequal society, elites find it easier to 'capture' governments and other institutions, and use them to further their own narrow interests, rather than the overall economic good.

Inequality undermines social cohesion. 'Vertical inequality' between individuals is linked to rises in crime, while 'horizontal inequality' (for example, between different ethnic groups) increases the likelihood of conflicts that can set countries back decades.

FROM POVERTY TO POWER

Inequality limits the impact of economic growth on poverty. A one percent increase in growth will benefit poor people more in an equal society than in an unequal one.

Inequality transmits poverty from one generation to the next. Most cruelly, the poverty of a mother can blight the entire lives of her children. Each year in developing countries around 30 million children are born with impaired growth due to poor nutrition during foetal development. Babies born with a low birth weight are much more likely to die, and should they survive, are more likely to face a lifetime of sickness and poverty.¹⁹

While inequality has received greater attention in recent years, rich country decision-makers have shied away from the idea of widespread redistribution of the kind that occurred in Europe after World War II or in the New Deal in the USA. The World Bank argues for equality of *opportunity* (for example, access to education, freedom from discrimination, equality before the law), but mentions greater equality of *outcome* only in relation to avoiding absolute deprivation. The redistribution of assets, through progressive taxation or radical land reform, is treated with great caution and its risks (for example, deterring investors) are continually stressed. When the rich world talks about development, it is more comfortable talking about poverty than about inequality, and it prefers inequality to redistribution.

Moreover, inequality holds the key to the poverty that persists around the world. The idea of ending poverty is not new, but the global economy now has the resources to actually do so. The twentieth century delivered extraordinary progress in health, education, democracy, technology, and economic growth. Each year, the global economy churns out some \$11,205 worth of goods and services per man, woman, and child – 25 times the \$456.25 per annum that defines the ‘extreme poverty’ of a billion human beings.²⁰ There is more than enough to go round. According to an analysis from the Brookings Institution, just \$66bn a year would be sufficient to lift everyone on the planet above the extreme poverty line of \$1.25 a day, if it could be delivered straight into the hands of poor people.^{21,22} That is just over half of the global aid budget and just 4 per cent of the world’s military spending in 2010.²³

POVERTY, THE HUMAN CONSEQUENCE OF INEQUALITY

At the sharp end of the skewed distribution of power, assets, and opportunities are the billion people who live in extreme poverty. Poverty is about much more than a low income, something that becomes particularly clear when people living in poverty are asked to define it for themselves. It is a sense of powerlessness, frustration, exhaustion, and exclusion from decision-making, not to mention the relative lack of access to public services,

1 INTRODUCTION: THE UNEQUAL WORLD

the financial system, and just about any other source of official support. Poverty has a deep existential impact – being denied the opportunity to flourish, whether for yourself or your children, cuts very deep indeed. The academic Robert Chambers talks of the world being divided into ‘uppers’ and ‘lowers’, a description that fits numerous aspects of poverty, whether women’s subjugation by men, or the power imbalances between ethnic groups, and social classes.²⁴

The many dimensions of poverty reinforce one another. Poor people are discriminated against, but many people are also poor because they suffer discrimination. In South Asia, households that face discrimination because of religion, ethnicity, or caste are significantly more vulnerable to labour market exploitation and debt bondage than other economically poor families.

In 2000, the World Bank published *Voices of the Poor*, a remarkable attempt at understanding poverty from the inside, based on discussions with 64,000 poor people around the world.²⁵ What emerged from these interviews was a complex and human account of poverty, encompassing issues that are often ignored, such as the need to look good and feel loved, the importance of being able to give one’s children a good start in life, or the mental anguish that all too often accompanies poverty. The overall conclusion was that, ‘again and again, powerlessness seems to be at the core of the bad life’.

The reverse of such ‘multi-dimensional’ poverty is not simply wealth (although income is important), but a wider notion of well-being, springing from health, physical safety, meaningful work, connection to community, and other non-monetary factors. That is why good development practices build on the skills, strengths, and ideas of people living in poverty – on their assets – rather than treating them as empty receptacles of charity.

Although this multi-dimensional view of poverty is widely accepted in theory, in practice, attention centres on income poverty, most commonly defined by the international ‘extreme poverty’ line of US\$1.25 a day, which forms the basis of the first Millennium Development Goal (MDG), that of halving the proportion of the world’s population living in extreme poverty by 2015.²⁶ Anyone living below that line is judged to be unable to feed themselves properly. The \$2-a-day ‘poverty line’ is seen as the minimum required to provide food, clothing, and shelter.

There is plenty of good news on development (often downplayed by those keen for further action). Extreme income poverty is falling over time. Between 1990 and 2005 the number of people worldwide in developing countries living on less than the international extreme poverty line of \$1.25 a day fell from 1.82 billion to 1.40 billion. As a proportion of the world’s rising population, this was a decline from 42 per cent to 26 per cent.²⁷

The nature and location of poverty is also changing. The UN notes ‘an increased tendency for people to rotate in and out of poverty, a rise in urban

FROM POVERTY TO POWER

poverty and stagnation in rural poverty, and increases in the proportion of informal workers among the urban poor and in the number of unemployed poor'.²⁸ In 2007, the earth's urban population overtook its rural population for the first time in human history, driven mainly by growth in cities in developing countries. Of the three billion urban residents in the world today, one billion live in slums, and are vulnerable to disease, violence, and social, political, and economic exclusion. UN-Habitat estimates that the world's slum population will double in the next 30 years, outpacing the predicted rate of urbanisation.²⁹

Globally, achievements in reducing income poverty can be attributed largely to the economic take-off of China and India. Despite worsening inequality, China in particular has made extraordinary progress, reducing the proportion of its people living in extreme poverty from 84 per cent in 1981 (835 million people) to just 16 per cent (208 million people) in 2005.³⁰

Many countries have shown how to grapple successfully with the other dimensions of poverty. Egypt has sustained one of the fastest declines in child mortality rates in the world since 1980. Bangladesh, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Viet Nam have also achieved rapid progress.³¹

Such advances should of course be celebrated and learned from, but should not be allowed to mask the plight of numerous countries and sectors in which progress has been slow or non-existent – and in many cases, poverty has been getting worse. In sub-Saharan Africa, the ranks of extremely poor people increased by 100.5 million between 1990 and 2005.³²

Beyond income poverty, too, the glass is not even close to half full. Compared with the position in 1999, there were 39 million fewer children of primary school age out of school in 2009, but close to 70 million still do not receive an education, 53 per cent of them girls. In 2009 there were 4.3 million fewer child deaths than there were in 1990, but 8 million children still die each year. Almost all such deaths are preventable. In Africa a child dies every 45 seconds of malaria; the disease accounts for 20 per cent of all childhood deaths.³³

The rapid scale-up in global immunisation since 2001 through the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization has also brought down the death toll, estimating that it has saved five million lives.³⁴ Yet diseases such as measles, diphtheria, and tetanus, which can be prevented with a simple vaccination, account for 1.5 million childhood deaths every year.³⁵ For every child who dies, many more will fall sick or will miss school, trapped in a vicious circle that links poor health in childhood to poverty in adulthood. Like the 358,000 women³⁶ who die each year from pregnancy-related causes, more than 98 per cent of the children who die each year live in poor countries.³⁷ That some poor countries have brought an end to such pain and suffering makes these deaths all the more unacceptable.

1 INTRODUCTION: THE UNEQUAL WORLD

Poor health is compounded by dirty water. Another 1.2 billion people have gained access to clean water over the past decade, but a further 0.9 billion still lack access to safe water and 2.6 billion have no access to improved sanitation.³⁸ Diseases transmitted through water or human waste are the second biggest cause of death among children worldwide,³⁹ after respiratory tract infection. The overall death toll: an estimated 3,300 children every day.⁴⁰

Hunger combines with ill health to weaken the bodies and undermine the futures of poor people. More than 925 million people, including one in four pre-school children, were undernourished in 2010, even though the world has enough food for its whole population, and the number has since risen along with international food prices.⁴¹ The appalling toll is both human and economic – for every year that hunger remains at such levels, premature death and disability rob developing countries of around \$500bn in lost productivity and earnings.⁴²

While poverty has been falling since 1980, HIV and AIDS have spread their grip across the poorest countries in the world, and AIDS has become a disease that mainly strikes women in developing countries. Although the spread of anti-AIDs drugs has meant that the rates of new infections and deaths have peaked and are slowly falling, in 2009, an estimated 1.8 million people still died from the disease, and another 2.6 million became infected with HIV. Almost all of these deaths were in the developing world, with 72 per cent of them in Africa. Some 33.3 million people are now living with HIV – 22.5 million of them in sub-Saharan Africa.⁴³ One in four adults in Lesotho, Botswana and Swaziland are HIV positive, and in sub-regions of those countries and South Africa the rate is far higher.⁴⁴

Some of the 1.4 billion people who live on less than \$1.25 a day are worse off than others. Many of them move in and out of poverty, according to the vagaries of the weather, personal circumstances, and the economy. An Oxfam survey of slum dwellers in the Indian city of Lucknow showed that over a three-year period, out of 424 households, 110 stayed poor, 162 stayed above the poverty line, and the remainder – just over a third – moved in and out of poverty.⁴⁵

Worldwide, some 340–470 million people constitute the ‘chronically poor’, trapped below the poverty line with little immediate prospect of escape.⁴⁶ Chronic poverty exists in all regions, but is heavily concentrated in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. Chronic poverty particularly affects children, older people, and people with disabilities, who face layers of social discrimination, often based on ethnicity, religion, or language.⁴⁷

Multiple deprivations reinforce one other. Indigenous children sent to schools that use a language foreign to them fail to acquire the education needed to find decent jobs and earn their way out of poverty, even when racial prejudice does not deny them equal opportunities. For these people, reducing the extent of their social and political exclusion and their vulnerability to shocks is more pressing than economic growth (since many of them are jobless and are likely to remain so).

ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP AND EFFECTIVE STATES

As Nelson Mandela says, poverty and extreme inequality rank alongside slavery and apartheid as evils that can be vanquished. This book argues for a radical redistribution of opportunities, but also of power and assets, to break the cycle of poverty and inequality.

People living in poverty certainly need opportunities, such as access to decent education, health care, water, and sanitation, and assistance to help them cope with the shocks of everyday life. Poor people need power over their own destinies and over the factors that influence them, such as party politics, the justice system, and the markets for land, labour, and goods and services.

In recent memory, a combination of pressure from below and enlightened leadership from above has produced some remarkable exercises in redistribution. In several East Asian countries, for example, elites have embraced the long-term case for equality, to prevent social division and to stoke a thriving economy. Taiwan and Viet Nam have combined astonishing growth with high levels of equity. Indonesia and Malaysia have managed to reduce inequality over an extended period through government-led redistribution and generation of employment.⁴⁸

In Brazil under the governments of Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff, popular movements have carried business elites along in redistributing wealth and opportunity in a hitherto appallingly unequal society. This has been achieved through a mixture of good economic management (for example, controlling inflation, which customarily hits poor people hardest) and redistributing income to poor people through various government schemes such as the Bolsa Familia, which pays poor families a monthly stipend if they ensure that their children attend school and are vaccinated.⁴⁹ Lula's first term saw the poorest 10 per cent of the population increase their incomes by 7 per cent a year, while the incomes of the richest 10 per cent stagnated. As a result, some five million Brazilians were lifted out of poverty, and inequality fell to its lowest level in 30 years.⁵⁰ A similar story of progress built on popular pressure and state action could be told of South Africa since the end of apartheid.

This book explores these and other efforts to grapple with inequality and poverty in three key areas: politics, markets, and vulnerability. In each case it finds that development, and in particular efforts to tackle inequality, is best achieved through a combination of active citizens and effective states.

By active citizenship, we mean that combination of rights and obligations that link individuals to the state, including paying taxes, obeying laws, and exercising the full range of political, civil, and social rights. Active citizens use these rights to improve the quality of political or civic life, through involvement in the formal economy or formal politics, or through the sort of collective action that historically has allowed poor and excluded groups

1 INTRODUCTION: THE UNEQUAL WORLD

to make their voices heard. For those who do not enjoy full rights of citizenship, such as migrants or (in some cultures) women, the first step is often to organise to assert those rights.

By effective states, we mean states that can guarantee security and the rule of law, and can design and implement an effective strategy to ensure inclusive economic growth. Effective states, often known as ‘developmental states’, must be accountable to citizens and able to guarantee their rights.

Why focus on effective states? Because history shows that no country has prospered without a state that can actively manage the development process. The extraordinary transformations of countries such as South Korea, Taiwan, Botswana, or Mauritius have been led by states that ensure health and education for all, and which actively promote and manage the process of economic growth. After twenty years of erosion by deregulation, ‘structural adjustment programmes’, and international trade and aid agreements, many states are weak or absent. But there are no short cuts, and neither aid nor NGOs can take its place; the road to development lies through the state.

Why active citizenship? Because people working together to determine the course of their own lives, fighting for rights and justice in their own societies, are critical in holding states, private companies, and others to account. Active citizenship has inherent merits: people living in poverty must have a voice in deciding their own destiny, rather than be treated as passive recipients of welfare or government action. What is more, the system – governments, judiciaries, parliaments, and companies – cannot tackle poverty and inequality by treating people as ‘objects’ of government or other action. Rather, people must be recognised as ‘subjects’, conscious of and actively demanding their rights, for efforts to bear fruit.

Active citizens, of course, are not limited to people living in poverty. Members of the middle class often play a vital role in supporting grassroots organisations, helping them deal with those in power, and challenging entrenched attitudes and beliefs among elites.

Most development practitioners acknowledge the centrality of citizenship and the state. However, in practice, for many NGOs development is about citizenship only, while for many official donor agencies and government ministries development is only about the state. The former elevate active citizenship to be synonymous with progress, while the latter reduce it to periodic elections and ‘consultation’ by government. Similarly, the latter elevate the state to the be-all-and-end-all of development, while the former eschew it as beyond their remit. In Oxfam’s experience, both are central to the pursuit of any development worth the name.

The focus on active citizens and effective states underlines the need to grapple with the central role of politics in development. Too often, discussions about development are conducted on the basis of policies rather than politics. Advocates adopt an ‘If I ruled the world, I would do X’ approach,

FROM POVERTY TO POWER

often portraying political leaders and movements in developing countries as irritants or obstacles. At best, politics is reduced to the depoliticised issue of 'governance'. Yet it is such leaders and movements that change societies, for better or worse, and understanding and engaging with politics is essential.

This book argues that active citizenship and effective states are compatible, as well as desirable. The challenge is to combine them as early as possible in a country's development. However, the relationship between the two is complex. They march to different rhythms, the steady grind of state machineries contrasting with the ebb and flow of civil society activism. In many cases, long-term development requires an element of deferred gratification, requiring businesses to reinvest rather than skim off profits, rich people to accept redistribution of wealth and income for the sake of national stability and growth, and poor people to limit demands for the improved wages and social spending that they so desperately need.

This in turn requires a 'social contract', a deal, whether explicit or implicit, that builds confidence and trust between citizens and the state. The nature of active citizenship and effective states, and their interaction, is explored in Part 2, which discusses the factors that contribute to active citizenship: the concept of rights, attitudes and beliefs, essential services, and access to information. This section also addresses property rights, corruption, and the spread of democracy.

There is an argument for including the private sector as a third pillar in this scheme, alongside state and citizens, interacting with the others both positively and negatively. As individual firms, the private sector creates jobs and products, transfers knowledge and technology, and contributes taxes to the state. Crucially, it drives the economic growth that is so vital to long-term development. But the private sector is more than the sum of its parts: economic power is indissolubly linked to political power, and who owns what determines to a large extent who says and decides what, shaping the landscape in which states and citizens interact, and development emerges. Over-powerful corporations can undermine states (for example, through bribery or inappropriate lobbying) or citizenship (by denying labour rights).

This book instead portrays a flourishing private sector as one objective of the interaction between effective states and active citizens, arguing that, between them, they can create enabling conditions for the kind of equitable, sustainable private sector activity and economic growth on which development relies. The private sector, along with the critical role of markets in tackling poverty and inequality, is discussed in Part 3, which sketches out the sort of economics needed to deliver real development, and its implications for rural livelihoods, labour, and growth models.

A particularly important role for citizens and states is dealing with vulnerability. People living in poverty are more vulnerable than those who are well off to personal disasters such as sickness or job loss, or at a community level

1 INTRODUCTION: THE UNEQUAL WORLD

to weather events, earthquakes, or outbreaks of conflict that invariably cause the greatest suffering among the poorest people.

A holistic effort to reduce vulnerability should be based on supporting and strengthening the self-organisation of poor people, and providing protection, whether at state or international level – what we term ‘human security’. Vulnerability and the search for such security are discussed in Part 4, which explores the increasing interest in social protection policies, the nature of and responses to hunger and famine, the growing impact of climate change on poor people and communities, and other risks such as HIV and AIDS, natural disasters, and violence and conflict.

While the history of development success shows that the crucible of change is primarily national and local, such change takes place in an increasingly globalised world of ever tighter political, economic, and cultural ties. In such a world, rich countries, societies, and corporations carry a great responsibility. The deeply inequitable forms of global governance must be overhauled to manage what are known as ‘global public goods’. Public goods have benefits that cannot easily be confined to a single ‘buyer’ (or set of ‘buyers’). Yet once they are provided, many can enjoy them for free. Street names are an example. A clean environment is another. At the global level, processes such as climate change, capital flows, migration, conflict, and trade and investment must be managed in the interests of human sustainability. In other areas, powerful governments and international institutions should do *less*: for example, refraining from imposing particular economic policies on developing countries, and recognising that effective states and active citizens are the main actors in the drama of development and must be allowed to experiment, fail, learn, and succeed.

Citizens and states in rich countries should concentrate on putting their own houses in order, cracking down on their current harmful activities, such as the arms trade, restrictions on the free flow of knowledge and technology, corporate malpractice, the forced liberalisation of trade and capital markets, and grotesque levels of planet-destroying carbon emissions. This ‘stop doing harm’ agenda should be complemented by ‘global citizenship’ – active solidarity by people and governments in the rich world with the struggles of poor people and their communities within developing countries. How this might be undertaken in the international systems for finance, trade, aid, humanitarian relief, and climate change is addressed in Part 5.

The combination of citizens and state is not intended to be a blueprint, still less an intellectual straitjacket. As this book stresses, different countries have followed diverse paths to development. But Oxfam’s experience on the ground suggests that some such combination lies at the heart of most, if not all, attempts to build a humane and sustainable development path, and is likely to play a vital role in tackling inequality and poverty during the course of the current century.

FROM POVERTY TO POWER

Perhaps the best way to illustrate the complex interplay between citizens and states is through concrete experiences of change. This book takes eight such examples at community, national, and global levels, and explores 'how change happens', using an approach sketched out in a background paper available on the *From Poverty to Power* website. This is a 'work in progress', and suggestions on how to improve its methodology are particularly welcome.

THIS BOOK

From Poverty to Power is partly the author's personal reflection, part conversation – the result of prolonged discussion within Oxfam and with numerous other development professionals, including some with views very different from our own. Given its origins, the content of the book inevitably concentrates on those areas in which Oxfam has most experience, and draws out a common story from that experience in the field.

The book is not a comprehensive statement of Oxfam's current thinking or of Oxfam's agreed official policies – for these, readers may consult Oxfam International's strategic plan⁵¹ – but is intended as a contribution to an evolving debate. In that spirit, readers wishing to join in the conversation should visit the Oxfam website.⁵²

First published in 2008, *From Poverty to Power* has been translated into Korean, Spanish, Portuguese and Italian, and the conversation it aimed to promote has since continued on the blog of the same name.⁵³ The years since publication have seen an extraordinary period of economic and political tumult – a global financial meltdown, a devastating spike in food prices, the eclipse of the G8 by the G20 and the uprisings of the Arab Spring are just the most memorable. These events have prompted this new edition of the book, substantially revised and updated.

Beyond the moral outrage aroused by so much needless injustice and suffering, this book is driven by the additional urgency of the development challenge today, when the planet's ecosystem itself is under threat. We need to build a secure, fair, and sustainable world before we pass the point of no return. As Martin Luther King Jr. presciently wrote over 40 years ago:

We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable... In this unfolding conundrum of life and history there is such a thing as being too late... We may cry out desperately for time to pause in her passage, but time is deaf to every plea and rushes on. Over the bleached bones and jumbled residues of numerous civilizations are written the pathetic words: Too late.⁵⁴

This book is predicated on the belief that it is not too late, provided leaders, organisations, and individuals act. Starting today.