

PART SEVEN

CONCLUSION

A NEW DEAL FOR A NEW CENTURY

This book sets out a vision of women and men in communities everywhere who are equipped with education, enjoying good health, with rights, dignity, and voice – in charge of their own destinies. Effective, accountable states and a dynamic economy propel countries forward, ensuring a fair distribution of assets, opportunities, and power. A democratic system of global governance manages the inevitable tensions and impacts of one country on another, and seeks to prepare for what increasingly looks like an approaching environmental storm.

The alternative – a world of ever-deepening gulfs between ‘haves’ (of wealth, technology, water, soil, carbon) and ‘have-nots’ – portends the needless suffering of continents, nations, and excluded groups within otherwise wealthy countries. Such a dystopia would not only be morally repugnant, but unstable and self-defeating, for the ‘uppers’ (in Robert Chambers’ terminology) would spend much of their time fending off the legions of ‘lowers’ hammering at the gates of privilege.

How did we get to this historic fork in the road? The twentieth century was a breathtaking drama, generating unprecedented bloodshed, but also extraordinary progress in terms of decolonisation, economic growth, the emancipation of women, and technological innovation. In retrospect, however, it missed an unrivalled opportunity to use that technological and material progress to end poverty and promote a ‘New Deal’ that would make poverty history.

It is not too late, but the environmental constraints imposed by climate change and finite natural resources bring unprecedented urgency. The old ways of low-intensity democracy, trickle-down economics, dirty growth and inept global governance have been found wanting.

In the effort to end poverty and gross inequality the central role will be played by active citizens and effective states. For only women and men struggling together for a better future, interacting with their governments, can deliver the kinds of social and political structures needed to make development serve the poorest individuals and communities.

New approaches and analytical tools are urgently needed. The discipline of economics must change its frame of reference, allowing policy-makers to see the full social, political, and environmental impact of their decisions, if the economies of the world are to move from dirty, inefficient (in terms of poverty reduction) growth to clean, smart growth that redistributes wealth to people living in poverty. And they must do this while respecting the boundaries on human activity imposed by the earth’s ecosystems.

FROM POVERTY TO POWER

The idea of security must be reclaimed as 'human security' – a combination of empowerment and protection that targets the manifold vulnerabilities that particularly afflict poor communities and individuals. 'Security' must no longer mean armed, gated communities and endless war.

The drive to end poverty and tackle inequality and suffering will take place in an ever more globalised, multi-polar world. Contrary to the views of the more facile globo-optimists, nation states will not wither away, but their actions will be increasingly constrained (for good or ill) by global rules and realities. That provides important roles for both rich and emerging country governments and their citizens. They need to help build a system of global governance that first ensures the powerful countries and corporations 'stop doing harm', then clears the road of obstacles to national development based on the combination of active citizens and effective states.

It is hard to imagine a more worthwhile cause. The fight against the scourges of poverty, inequality, and the threat of environmental collapse will define the twenty-first century, as the fight against slavery or for universal suffrage defined earlier eras. Fail, and future generations will not forgive us. Succeed, and they will wonder how the world could have tolerated such needless injustice and suffering for so long.