

Ms. Nadine Gordimer's Speech

The United Nations Development Programme – UNDP – is the UN's global development network, advocating for change and connecting countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build a better life. The UNDP Awards for Human Development recognize excellence in the National Human Development Reports. UNDP's premier tool for policy analysis and advocacy at the national and regional levels.

Our event today is made possible through the support of the United Nations Foundation, established by Ted Turner in 1997.

We meet on a great occasion: we are not gathered to make plans to better human lives. We are not here to talk about closing the vast gap between the haves and have-nots. Not today. We are here to honour and celebrate what has been achieved. We are here to honour and celebrate projects in human development fulfilled by the vision, energy and determination of people in their own countries in co-operation with the United Nations Development Programme. We are here to recognize innovative evidence of how human development can and is being put into practice in different countries by varied means, from Brazil to Botswana, from Indonesia to Chile, from Nepal to Bolivia.

The UNDP is Chair of the United Nations Development Group within the Millennium Declaration's goals--peace, security, and the essential concomitants of these: human rights, livable environment, good governance and development.

No agency can attempt, let alone achieve development with and for a people, a country, unless fully informed both of people's conception of their needs--what resources they have, how their economy works, what religious, secular and civic customs they follow: all their diverse needs, and how they envisage best meeting them.

The UNDP, through its Resident Co-ordinators working in 166 countries, has long initiated numerous successful development projects, but of equal importance--perhaps even greater in the global possibilities of development--has been the more recent innovation and publication of national and regional Human Development Reports as ancillaries to the Global Human Development Report, that encyclopaedia and bible for all of us who care about the state of the planet we occupy as our human destiny. The national and regional reports are invaluable as a basis for global application and action, supplying vital information not only of the wide concept of the nature of development as it evolves on the ground, in forests and deserts, in rural villages and urban shacks--what forms development is undertaking--but providing garnered knowledge of what ought, what still is, to be done in the effective way if we are to make a reality of the vowed intention to halve the figure of dollar-a-day poverty by 2015.

The definition of human development as revealed, for example, by the Arab Human Development Report, whose scope is the people of 22 member states of the Arab region, and the National Human Development Report on the vast and diverse regions of India, is mind-opening. These comprehensive reports that do not shirk to admit unresolved difficulties as well as evidencing remarkable successes, corroborate a definition that comes from the UNDP Global Human Development Report this year: 'Development is about much more than raising national incomes. It is also a process of enlarging people's choices and creating an environment where people can develop their potential, lead productive lives and participate in the decisions that directly affect them. This concept of human development has inspired a growing movement in every region of the world where people are working towards their own developmental solutions.'

There have been and continue to be many surprising projects in the partnerships between the UNDP and peoples of the developing world. I have a special memory of being present a few years ago at the Poverty Eradication Award Ceremony when an exquisite little figurine in her

delicate national dress, a village woman from Vietnam, was honoured. But she was no ethnic doll: she was receiving on behalf of her community an award for the fishing industry she had created with the enablement, provided along with the community's hard work, by UNDP expertise and initial funding.

The choice of which Reports were to receive the National Human Development Report Awards must be a difficult but highly invigorating task, if one looks at the range of this year's awards. The criteria were: excellence in support of the Millennium Development Goals; Excellence in Human Development Innovations; Excellence in a Participatory and Inclusive Process; Excellence in Policy Impact; Excellence in Quality of Analysis. You will hear how these theoretical concepts became realities.

The awards are richly deserved and necessary recognition of what, given the opportunity, the enablement, the peoples of our discriminatory and divided world can do for themselves, and by the extension, to the ultimate human interdependence, for all who inhabit our planet. Writing of the question of human identity, Amartya Sen*, one of the initiators of the Global Human Development Reports in 1990, has written of human societal and individual seclusion from global realities of identity in the image of a frog, known in early Indian philosophy as the well-frog, kupamanduka' --the frog in his identity-well of certainty.

The UNDP Awards for National Human Development Reports reveal how much there is to face, how much there is to learn in the wide and varied human situations of which we inevitably are part. And how much there is to celebrate, emulate and pursue, in the human spirit. The well is blindness to the harsh light of realities the laureates of today's awards put to use to achieve human development.

Nadine Gordimer

* Amartya Sen, 'The Predicament of Identity', BIBLIO--A Review of Books, March-April 2002.

Text of the Second Dorab Tata memorial Lecture, New Delhi 2001.