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FREEDOM AND THE AGENTS OF CHANGE

AMARTYA SEN'S PROPOSAL FOR URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Address delivered by Mr Romi Khosla at the Palais d'Egmont, Brussels, hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, foreign trade and international cooperation, in the presence of H.R.H. Prince Philippe.

Ladies and Gentleman,

I am here before you today to uphold the immense importance of Professor Amartya Sen's ideas and to emphasise their potential impact on subjects that are being deliberated at this gathering.

But before I go any further, however, I would like to offer a brief explanation. When this gathering was planned some time ago, the organizers envisaged that Professor Sen would address this important gathering today. I am here to bring you his regards as well as his regrets for not being here. Unfortunately today's even coincided with his academic and ceremonial obligations at Cambridge. Indeed, this day he explained to me is the one day in the year when he cannot leave Trinity College where he is the Master. However he did recognise the importance of the occasion and especially the possibility of taking his ideas forward into implementation through some sort of co-ordinated effort. When I suggested that we could have his distant presence here, he readily agreed to give an interview on film. You will be able to see a short version of this interview after my brief introduction. This interview was filmed some weeks ago and a fuller version can be seen on the CD, which DFID has prepared and circulated.

My own engagement with the idea's of Amartya Sen began when he taught me as an undergraduate. It was only more recently that I returned to his work for guidance on contemporary issues. I had been working with the UNDP in the urban reconstruction efforts in the Balkans, Kosovo and Palestine and much of what I saw and experienced there became comprehensible after referring to Sen's work. For in all those hidden and expressed conflicts and conditions of suffering, the problem was not poverty. It was the imposition of unfreedoms. Poverty was the manifestation of this imposed unfreedom.

Surrounded as we are with the uncertainties of conflicts I believe that our approach to development is faltering. It is faltering because much of the literature of development theories that had occupied the centre stage of economic thinking during the cold war now seems to have become irrelevant and for two key reasons:

Firstly because the projected expectations from the new millennium economies of the first, second and third worlds have become highly uncertain. And secondly, because many of us have not fully understood or gauged the implications of the key role that urbanisation is going to play in the coming century. The first reason can be regarded as a macro reason and needs another forum for discussion.

However the second reason, the role of urbanisation, is of immediate concern to us here. The basic building blocks of civilisation are its urban centres and it is in these centres that fast and radical changes are taking place. Sen believes that cities are crucial to the revitalisation of nations. He sees dispersed and well-governed urban centres as the alternative to unmanageable-cities with neglected hinterlands.

Huge demographic movements are taking place in Africa and Asia at this moment. Such movements are unprecedented in the history of Man. Millions of people are being displaced by the ravages of armed conflicts, arbitrary authoritarianism and the absence of governance. The displaced are migrating to the urban centres and very soon we will have to accept that more people on this globe will be living in cities than in the countryside. If we combine the effect of this enormous migration with the contention of the world Bank that the number of poor are increasing, cities have surely become the places from which the directions for new development policies must emerge. They can either become centres of intense community conflicts or the centres of social and economic and political development.

We are indeed in a situation in which every country, every donor country is willing to pursue any and every approach and policy to improve their situation. Multiple goals and targets have become acceptable in what seems an ocean of development problems.

In these circumstances either one accepts the contention of some experts who describe the contemporary times as static times where the plateau of post modern post development and post historical conditions will now prevail for ever, or one believes there is a need to meet this challenge with the optimism of a new approach a new vision for development policies.

I wish to describe this optimism with the possibility of a new approach. We have before us new opportunities to re -describe all our developmental goals. We need to describe our developmental goals in such a way that they are placed within a context of a larger more universal aspiration. Such an approach has been most clearly articulated by Amartya Sen. His concepts link development to freedom and there is no doubt cities have the potential for carrying out the changes in policy that Sen is advocating. I believe Sen's ideas that link Development to Freedom can replace this irrelevance and are thus now crucial for policy makers as well as the theoreticians of Development

Indeed the five instruments of freedom that he identifies in his book 'Development as Freedom' define a comprehensive universal, moral and ethical principle of ever expanding freedom as the relevant goal of any development. These five instruments are the basic building blocks for a democratic society. It is the simplicity and totality of the idea of ever expanding freedom that merits our special attention. This is the recognition given by the Royal Swedish Academy' Nobel Prize that cites Sen's work for breaking new ground and for being relevant for our future. Freedom is the primary end as well as the principal means of development.

Three aspects are emphasised:

Firstly, that the individual human being is society's most important component. Each human being is unique and wants to live a unique life. It is his or her fundamental right to be free and live the life that he or she values. The process of development is one that removes obstructions and enables the citizen to move closer to the life that he or she values.

Secondly, freedom has cultural and spiritual qualities because it springs from within the citizen. It relates more to the rewarding satisfaction of exploring ones own potential and character. Increasing freedom is linked to development and can be translated into specific policies.

Freedom can be expanded through its five components or instruments that influence the potential of the citizen. These are the instruments that citizens need to enable them to overcome their constraints. More important these are the instruments that inform us of the degrees of unfreedom that are prevalent in a society and hence the degree of underdevelopment.

The five types of freedoms are: *Political Freedoms, Economic Facilities, Social opportunities, Transparency Guarantees and Protective Security*. All five are interconnected and equally important. They are like the five equally important sides of a box in which urban investments can be contained.

Political freedom. It is imperative that citizens should determine who should rule them and they must have the right to criticize the authorities.

The Freedom to access **Economic Facilities** provide opportunities for trade and access for sellers and buyers of labour, goods, property and finance in their locality.

The third interrelated instrument of freedom is **Social Opportunities**. These are the arrangements and choice of opportunities that citizens have for education, health care and other community, social and religious facilities to live a better life.

Fourthly are **Transparency Guarantees** that give free access of information to citizens on matters that effect their lives.

And lastly there is the instrument of **Protective Security**. Citizens expect institutional arrangements to protect and support them in times of dire need from the consequences of man made and natural disasters.

In the **third** aspect emphasised by Sen relates to evaluations and new frameworks. How does one measure the status of this freedom and hence the degree of development? One needs a system of evaluation, co-ordination and shared policy frameworks. And if cities are going to be pivotal to development changes in the future, some conclusions can be drawn:

1. We cannot move forward without a common policy framework that is shared between city administrations. It is my contention that this common framework could be based on the 5 freedoms defined by Amartya Sen.
2. There is a need for city alliances to formulate shared charters of local governance that incorporates the five instruments of freedom as the guiding principles of local governance.

- 3 As part of this shared city-to-city project, there is a need to re-evaluate the existing urban environment. By re-evaluating the existing urban environment with additional new indices, one could measure degrees of freedom rather than relying exclusively on measuring degrees of poverty. Additional indices are needed and include a broader Human Freedom Index whose constituent parts are the five instrumental indices each of which provide measures for the degree of instrumental freedom experienced by urban citizens.

Let me conclude by emphasising the importance of our gathering today.

We have an opportunity to introduce change. In the coming century, it is the city that is going to be the crucial instrument of change. If we accept that this change is to be for the better, then let us strengthen and widen our city-to-city co-operation. Let us share the ethical, social, political and economic goals of expanding freedoms across the developed and underdeveloped divide, and let us enshrine these principles in new charters of urban governance.

The setting up of such a shared monitoring mechanism would enable the conclusions of shared evaluation indices to be integrated into common charters. This would be available to governments as well as donors as the basis for identifying policy goals and would enable them to make comparisons across cities.

And once we agree to do that, we can re-evaluate the conditions of our cities with new indices that measure the *causes* and not the *symptoms* of underdevelopment.