

# HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 1997



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Eradicating poverty everywhere is more than a moral imperative—it is a practical possibility. That is the most important message of *Human Development Report 1997*. The world has the resources and the know-how to create a poverty-free world in less than a generation. This is not woolly idealism. Over the past three decades a dozen or more developing countries have shown that it is possible to eliminate absolute poverty.

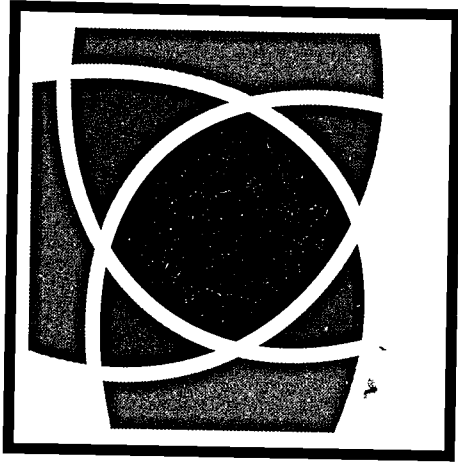
Almost all countries committed themselves to eradicating absolute poverty at the World Summit for Social Development in 1995. Many, including some of the largest, have embarked with all the seriousness required to achieve this goal.

The Report reviews this global challenge from a human development perspective. It focuses not just on poverty of incomes but on poverty as a denial of choices and opportunities for living a tolerable life. The agenda thus includes but goes beyond income—encompassing action in the critical areas of gender equality, pro-poor growth, globalization and the governance of development.









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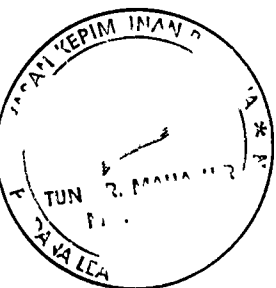
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# Foreword

The 1990s began with a great surge of hope. With the cold war over, the world could harness its enormous resources for development and prosperity. During the first six years of the 1990s world conferences and summit meetings emphasized the urgency of eradicating poverty. The World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen—attended by representatives of 185 governments and an unprecedented 117 heads of state and government—sharpened this focus. Countries committed themselves to the goal of eradicating poverty “as an ethical, social, political and moral imperative of human-kind” and recognized people-centred development as the key to achieving it.

In parallel, poverty eradication has become an overarching goal of international action—and of the United Nations system’s work in the followup to the UN conferences and summits. The social development summit’s programme of action calls on the United Nations Development Programme “to undertake efforts to support the implementation of social development programmes”. UNDP has made the eradication of poverty its overriding priority. As the principal antipoverty arm of the United Nations, it is well placed to work with other parts of the UN system, especially its sister organizations and agencies at the country level, to assist states in their programmes to eradicate poverty. Already UNDP is working with more than 70 countries to follow up on the commitment made at Copenhagen.

This year’s *Human Development Report* builds on that commitment. Its most important message is that poverty is no longer inevitable. The world has the material and natural resources, the know-how and the

people to make a poverty-free world a reality in less than a generation. This is not woolly idealism but a practical and achievable goal. Over the past three decades a dozen or more developing countries have shown that it is possible to eliminate absolute poverty. And most industrial countries had largely eradicated absolute poverty by the 1970s, although some have slipped in the past decade.

Poverty is not to be suffered in silence by the poor. Nor can it be tolerated by those with the power to change it. The challenge now is to mobilize action—state by state, organization by organization, individual by individual.

Poverty has many faces. It is much more than low income. It also reflects poor health and education, deprivation in knowledge and communication, inability to exercise human and political rights and the absence of dignity, confidence and self-respect. There is also environmental impoverishment and the impoverishment of entire nations, where essentially everyone lives in poverty. Behind these faces of poverty lies the grim reality of desperate lives without choices and, often, governments that lack the capacity to cope.

This year’s Report offers ideas for eradicating absolute poverty. The agenda includes but goes beyond income, encompassing gender, pro-poor growth, globalization and governance.

As in previous years, this year’s *Human Development Report* is the fruit of a collaborative effort by a team of eminent consultants and the Human Development Report team. Richard Jolly, my Special Adviser, together with Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, Director, Human Development Report Office, led the effort.

Tsuneo Ishikawa, Gareth Jones, John Langmore, Juan Luis Londoño, Chris McCormick, Michael McPeak, Geraldo Nascimento, Roger Normand, Peter Ogram, Saeed Ordoubadi, William Prince, Purificacion Quisumbing, Martin Ravallion, Lora Sabin, Nafis Sadik, Juan Somavia, Lawrence Summers, Abram de Swaan, Peter Townsend, Tessa Wardlow, Yin Yan, Toru Yanagihara and Sarah Zaidi.

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