

Release of Social Development Report 2010

1 December 2010, Indian International Centre, New Delhi

In the presence of an august gathering, the Social Development Report 2010 was released by Shri Mani Shankar Aiyer (Former Minister, Government of India) in a function organized jointly by Council for Social Development and the Oxford University Press at India International Centre on 1 December, 2010. Speaking on the occasion Shri Aiyer highlighted the significance of the Report particularly for deprived and marginalized sections of Indian society. Agreeing broadly with the theme and contents of the Report, he spoke about the concern shown in the report regarding the increasing GDP growth, but not translating it into poverty reduction. He identified GDP growth rate, National per capita Income (NPI) and National Poverty Line (NPL) as three enemies of Indian people particularly those who are carrying multiple deprivations including marginalized and poor. He drew a historical parallel between the developments that took place in United States of America in 18th and 19th centuries in the name of democracy and the development trajectory adopted by Indian Government for the last sixty years. He emphasized that the American democracy left only two choices before the Red Indians (which is a political misnomer); either they had to give their land for industrialization or face death. In India, expressing his anxiety, he said the same kind of development model has been adopted by the present government as well as its predecessors in the past. He said that on the one hand successive governments have been giving lot of incentives to industrialists in the form of tax concessions; on the other hand the funds for the development of deprived and marginalized sections have become victim of the legal budget deficit cap. He spoke of the recently exposed 2G spectrum scam and the involvement of politician, industrialists and media in the scam. His concern was that the recent spate of development is squeezing out resources from the areas where it is needed most.

Further elaborating the problem of double digit growth of GDP, he said it is true that high tide of GDP growth lifts all the boats of development but in case of Indian GDP growth it is not commensurate with growth in agricultural sector which is just 2-3 per cent; however Indian agriculture still engages sixty-seven percent of total work forces. The crux of his speech was that the double digit growth is not providing any benefit to marginalised, poor, and scheduled tribes

which are shown clearly in HDI where we have not moved forward. He criticized the functioning of bureaucrats and suggested a complete overhaul of the system. Unless we do that the problem of Naxalite cannot be dealt effectively. He said we do not have mechanism to measure or find out how many poor actually moved up from their position.

Before the release of the Report Professor Manoranjan Mohanty, the editor of India Social Development Report 2010 emphatically asserted the uniqueness of the report and stated that on several counts the SDR 2010 is ahead of Human Development Report that is published by the UNDP. He said while in the city a large section of Indian intelligentsia is celebrating the double digit growth of Indian economy; the report gives us opportunity to intervene for marginalized sections of our society. Further elaborating on the significance of the Report, he said we have used differential indicators of social deprivation in social development index. He added that despite having reduction in poverty (according to government sources) the number of malnourished has not seen commensurate decline.

Professor Bina Agarwal covered the SDR 2010 broadly while speaking on the report and suggested that with all demerits of double GDP growth we cannot go back to zero GDP growth. She appreciated the effort made by CSD in terms of publishing such a vital report which is, distinct from other reports because it consists of empirical data. She expressed apprehension over the current land use and community farming as disadvantageous for marginal and small farmers. Speaking on the occasion Professor Zoya Hasan gave equal importance to SDR and HDR. She appreciated the report for having qualitative assessment of data on the whole issue of marginality, marginal groups and SDR Index. She, however, felt that this report could have established link with certain policy initiatives taken by UPA-I and UPA-II particularly Sanchar Committee Report and MNREGA. She opined that MNREGA was the product of top down approach of the Government which is contrary to the fact mentioned in the report that it is a product of pressure from above as well movement from below. She said we are living in the paradox of democracy and deprivation and questioned whether social development is a state subject or concurrent subject. She emphasized the mediating role of State, between State and people, has hugely gone down. She felt the need to have autonomous watchdog institutions like Equal Opportunity Commission.

The function was largely attended by an array of academicians, researchers, activists, media and the publishing house. It was a very pleasant evening with cool breeze and warm intellectual talk. CSD and OUP would like to thank all those who could make it to the occasion.