

Removing Unfreedoms
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London School of Economics

Speaker: Sheela Patel

For us, I think this particular meeting and our discussion represent for us a very symbolic moment in spite of what Jockin is trying to say. Poor people in our communities are now refusing to be objects of other people's assessment and development. We are not happy to be slotted into different theories and different perceptions and different people's ways of analysing world. We want to participate in the design and the creation of the process. So first of all our involvement in Amartya Sen's concept of freedoms puts us in a different category. When I met Jane and Romi we had a meeting that Michael had set up for us. The discussion we had was the challenge that we had in front of us was, can these concepts and the ideas, we discussed with the communities, slum dwellers, who perceived themselves to be agents of change.

We actually had a conversation, which explained these things. In return, could be concerns that the imageries, manners of functioning their community, the way it is perfected to do anyway, can they really contribute to sharpening and developing of. And for us at **Sparc** this was very important because right now we are at a point at which every third master student wants to come and do some dissertation and some research of ours. We get e-mails every day from someone who has checked out our web site and wants to look at one small aspect of some project that we are doing somewhere and it is very difficult how to piece all these things together and engage the development community. This place is very symbolic of that discussion.

What we found out basically is that we always seem to be in argument and almost obstructive, in other people's attempt, we evaluate and monitor what we do. The important part of that is because, we refuse to participate well at least I cannot get the **Federation** to participate in

exploration of the specifics. For instance when Jane talked about the whole discussion that happened in those three days about, what about the aspirations of the individual? How does the federation fulfil those aspirations? The answer that constantly comes from all of us is that it is human nature to do things collectively and we cannot fulfil them individually, and by nature, we agree to do things together. More people do things together; women do things together because they cannot fulfil the aspirations/goals by themselves. And the **Federation** creates this huge backdrop for those aspirations, the individual, the community, the neighbourhood, the city and the national level, even global world, where nothing is either local or global. Everything is all mixed up.

So what the **NSDF** does is that by its presence at the absolute community level through the **Manila Milan** saving group, and at the Federation level where it is dealing with city, whether it is discussing on issues of subsidies and other things that the provincial or the state level or having a dialogue at national level. The important thing is there is an association of an organization that work for people- articulated in the manner that they feel comfortable with. That forces the rest of the environment to listen to them in a language that they are comfortable with. And for me that is the beginning of the tipping back of the scale of equality in the discourse between those who are from the outside, seeking to bring development investment into these communities, and the poor themselves who refuse to be pushed into the role of beneficiaries and consumers of development.

And I think that this produces for us a new chapter in our own association with the outside world because we become the bridge in that communication process and we are always not always on top of the development language. We get confused about what different concepts mean. We often interpret them differently. We have to hire somebody to write log frames, we don't know what they are. But when you come down to the level of what poor people want, how they want it, how they want to structure their institutions to produce sustainable development that is their aspiration, I think we are on solid ground. And therefore I think a

very important part of today's dialogue here, is for us to look at what these concepts of freedoms bring in terms of language to us.

For us three things come out, which were very exciting in discussions. The first one was we were not only talking about development in context of scarcity, we are talking about development as a natural process. It is about that and I think you explained that to us and we read about it and we found that exciting.

Being part of the process of development is everybody is entitled to and everybody has a right to aspire for that. And that everything that comes in the way is an obstruction. So this language of which are obstructions, how did they come in? Who identifies those obstructions, who finds solutions for those obstructions, whose help do you take to get rid of the obstructions have become an interesting way of analysis. But I think the most important thing that we want to bring into this discourse is that however important and we agreed, that ultimately the importance of the benefits of all development is to improve the individual, it is impossible for a poor person in an individual capacity to take on the agency of exploring these freedoms in today's world.

I think somewhere along the way, how networks and association and mechanisms to strengthen those associations support these aspirations for change-- I think somewhere they have to be included in this discourse because in most development projects, in an attempt to say that individual is important and I want to look at how the fifth woman in the first sixth settlement and whether her aspirations for freedom are taken care of. The volume of such women in need to be explored collectively is lost in the three to five year projects. And the process of having no voice at all and then to be able to say this is what I aspire-- and how long it takes get forgotten in the projects cycle of three to five years.

So for me there is a whole new level of dialogue and discussion that needs to happen in our development circle to say that if you are really talking about sustainable development it is not going to come in three and a half year projects then evaluated during the next five years. And the theory

comes fifteen years later. Then the one that we started out with is wrong and now is the right one. And that is where many of us are trapped. It would be interesting in our development to say how can the theorization, whatever theories are called, however much they may be contested here, how can they become things that people's organizations and NGO's can be made to produce knowledge that becomes useful for them. And they just don't become valuable to account for the money they gave for development, but it actually produced knowledge. It works for all the people in the world. I would like to stop here