

It is my pleasure to welcome you all to the third session of the Forum on Minority Issues. For the last 5 years there has been great collaboration between UNDP and the mandate of the Independent Expert on Minority Issues, Ms Gay McDougall. The tradition of collaboration is now continuing to 2010, when the theme for this year's forum is 'minorities and effective economic participation in economic life'. What I would like to talk to you today is about the whole issue of inclusive development and economic participation for the minorities.

Let me first talk about, what is meant by inclusive economic development. I think there are major characteristics of inclusive development with three specific dimensions. The first one is that inclusive development must ensure that people from all walks of life participate in the development process. Not only as active participants that influence the process but also as beneficiaries of the process. The second characteristic is that in inclusive development there has to be equitable distribution of opportunities as well as benefits. And the third characteristic is that whenever there are vulnerabilities and shocks inclusive development must ensure that disadvantaged groups, vulnerable groups are protected.

Having said that, when we think about economic participation it basically means that people from all walks of life participate in the organisation and the decision-making regarding economic growth and economic development. And in order to do so, certain conditions must be made. That people should have access to assets, people should have access to capabilities, people should have access to productive sources, and people should have access to decision-making process.

If we think of capabilities and opportunities, then immediately we know that minorities face a lot of discrimination, they are disadvantaged on both fronts. In terms of capabilities, we know that even in the United States the African-Americans have a life expectancy which is 13 years less than the life expectancy of Americans. In terms of the opportunities we also know that the Roma population has an income which is just one third of the national average, or the child mortality rate among Roma is much higher than that of other national average. Therefore, the fundamental question is how we can ensure that the economic participation opportunities are there for the minorities both on the capability side and on the opportunity side. Having said that then the issues is what are the policy dimensions that we can think of? The first policy dimension that we can think of is macro-economic policies. Definitely the macro economic policies in terms of resource allocations, in terms of expenditures, in terms of opening up opportunities and minorities should be there. There has to be social investment for education, for health, for access to safe water, access to basic social services, so that capabilities of minorities are there that is built and that is enhanced. But building the capabilities is not enough as it is the first step of ensuring their rights. We have to create opportunities. And in order to create opportunities the macro economic policies should be generated in such a way that they have access to productive resources. Land is one such resource on which minorities depend a lot. The issue of [...] is important, the issue of ethnic-cultural impulse in the area of rural development is important. SO the fundamental issue is that there should be enough access of minorities to productive sources.

But is macro-economic framework or are macro-economic policies enough? The answer is 'no'. The policies have to be translated into social sectors. The policies have to be translated in terms of targeted measures for some of the groups. The policies need to be translated in to some of the [royal] issues going beyond resources. And there the whole question of the legal framework the institutions come into play, because if the legal framework has an inherent bias and discrimination against minorities, then they cannot participate effectively in economic life. If there are no institutions, which support the minorities in order to enhance their capabilities handing advantage of the opportunities then basically their wellbeing is not ensured.

Therefore, in a nutshell, the policy framework involved in a particular country, the institutions, the legal framework, the whole structure of it have to geared towards a non-discriminatory dimension, and should be geared to enhancing the capabilities and opportunities of minorities. Definitely the governments have a role to play there, but the role should be extended to civil society, to the media, NGOs and to international organisations. It is in this broader context that we are now having this particular discussion on the issues of minorities and effective economic participation for their wellbeing. I am pretty sure, that the delivered issues of the next two days would basically focus on different important aspects of the issues that will be discussed. And at the end of it will come up with very concrete action plans that would basically ensure their wellbeing. UNDP has always been and is committed to human development from all walks of life and in that context we have very much supportive of the work that the independent expert is doing and we want to take the agenda forward in the coming years. Thank you.