

# Foreword

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Life at the edge of existence. This predicament is shared by the equivalent of the populations of the USA, Europe, and Russia, and the number is increasing every year. Poverty is still the gravest insult to human dignity. Poverty is the scar on humanity's face. Poverty is prevalent despite decades of international efforts to eradicate it.

Our inability so far to beat poverty haunts our common political record. Our history of dealing with poverty is an epic of protracted stalemates, indifference, bureaucracy, and empty rhetoric. People and countries of goodwill have made serious efforts, only to suffocate in the quagmire of inefficiency, institutional rivalry, and inconsistent follow-up.

One hundred years ago, Norway was among the poorest countries in Europe. Its present society is shaped by generations of people who have made workable compromises between capital and labour within the framework of representative democracy. There is no other way to equity, prosperity, and social justice than empowering people (men and women), allowing democracy to work, harnessing market forces, taxing surpluses, and redistributing the proceeds.

We know a lot about the effects of poverty, how it is linked to environmental decline, how it squanders human resources, how it undermines the developing potential of countries. We know a great deal about the causes of poverty. In country after country we see the link between low rates of school enrolment and poverty, between insufficient basic health services and poverty, between the absence of credit opportunities and the presence of poverty, and between gender discrimination and poverty.

In the past, we have adopted work programmes and plans of action, even priority programmes, which have been acted on

with a conspicuous lack of dynamism. The blame lies not only with the lack of generosity of developed countries that like to assume the mantle of donorship. The poor countries too are responsible. Priorities must be set and acted upon. Investment in people and affirmative action to the benefit of the poor are needed. Countries that do not put their own people first will pay dearly and lag even further behind.

We need constantly to remind ourselves and to expand our knowledge about the root causes of poverty and about its effects. That is why I welcome this book and recommend it. Its subject is compelling. How we respond to knowledge about poverty will determine how we enter the twenty-first century and the prospects for a more just, more equitable, world.

There is enough food in the world to feed the hungry, but they do not have access to it. There is enough knowledge in this world to educate everybody. Knowledge is an infinite resource, but the means of its dissemination are lacking, owing to a lack of political priorities.

My colleague from India said the following in the London Guildhall one year ago: "No great industrialist is going to come and look after the primary health centers of my country. No multinational company is going to run our primary schools." The market alone will not provide prosperity, equity, or social justice. Equal opportunity is created; it does not happen by means of trickle-down theories or monetary policies. In the course of history, there are examples of equal opportunities being taken where they were not given. We have the choice to give.