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VOICES OF THE POOR
From
Many Lands

Edited by

Deepa Narayan

Patti Petesch



THE WORLD BANK

VOICES OF THE POOR
From Many Lands

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Foreword

This is the final book in a three-part series entitled *Voices of the Poor*. The series is based on an unprecedented effort to gather the views, experiences, and aspirations of more than 60,000 poor men and women from sixty countries. The work was undertaken for the *World Development Report 2000/2001: Attacking Poverty*.

The first volume in the series, *Can Anyone Hear Us?*, draws from studies conducted in the 1990s and brings together the voices of over 40,000 poor people from fifty countries. The second volume, *Crying Out for Change*, is based on comparative fieldwork conducted in 1999 and includes the voices of over 20,000 poor men and women in twenty-three countries. *From Many Lands* presents a selection of these country studies. The *Voices of the Poor* study is different from all other large-scale poverty studies. Using participatory and qualitative research methods, the study presents directly, through poor people's own voices, the realities of their lives. How do poor people view poverty and wellbeing? What are their problems and priorities? What is their experience with the institutions of the state, markets, and civil society? How are gender relations faring within households and communities? We want to thank the project team led by Deepa Narayan of the Poverty Group in the World Bank, and particularly the country research teams, for undertaking this work.

What poor people share with us is sobering. A majority of them feel they are worse off and more insecure than in the past. Poor people care about many of the same things all of us care about: happiness, family, children, livelihood, peace, security, safety, dignity, and respect. Poor people's descriptions of encounters with a range of institutions call out for all of us to rethink our strategies. From the perspective of poor people, corruption, irrelevance, and abusive behavior often mar the formal institutions of the

state. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), too, receive mixed ratings from the poor. Poor people would like NGOs to be accountable to them. Poor people's interactions with traders and markets are stamped with their powerlessness to negotiate fair prices. How then do poor people survive? They turn to their informal networks of family, kin, friends, and neighbors. But these are already stretched thin.

We commend to you the authenticity and significance of this work. What can be more important than listening to the poor and working with our partners all over the world to respond to their concerns? Our core mission is to help poor people succeed in their own efforts, and the book raises major challenges to both of our institutions and to all of us concerned about poverty. We are prepared to hold ourselves accountable, to make the effort to try to respond to these voices. Obviously we cannot do this alone. We urge you to read this book, to reflect and respond. Our hope is that the voices in this book will call you to action as they have us.

CLARE SHORT,
Secretary of State for International
Development, U.K.

JAMES D. WOLFENSOHN,
President,
World Bank

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