



Senior Minister for International Cooperation Dr. Sarath Amunugama speaking at the inaugural session of the Policy Dialogue. At the head table are (from left) IPS Executive Director Dr. Saman Kelegama and UN Resident Coordinator in Sri Lanka Subinay Nandy

From poverty to sustainability in Sri Lanka

ON the occasion of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, Senior Minister for International Cooperation Dr. Sarath Amunugama invited everyone to look at issues of poverty alleviation from the perspective of the poor: emphasising the importance of enhancing the capabilities of the poor to lift themselves out of poverty.

These remarks were made

during the inaugural session of a Policy Dialogue, hosted jointly by the Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka (IPS), Ministry of Economic Development and the United Nations in Sri Lanka under the theme 'From Poverty to Sustainability - People at the Centre of Inclusive Development'.

The Minister went on to highlight Sri Lanka's success in poverty alleviation but

also called for more detailed research and analysis of current social welfare practices to better define future programs factoring in issues of inventive, proper targeting as well structural issues of labour mobility in the context of need and demands in Sri Lanka and globally.

Ajay Chhibber, the UN Assistant Secretary General, Director of UNDP's Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific and Chair of the UN Development Group, Asia and the Pacific, in a pre-recorded message, welcomed the theme in the context of Asia where many countries have sustained high rates of growth for a number of years and are now looking at how to ensure the growth translates into reducing poverty for a much higher proportion of people.

Indeed, a key focus of the dialogue was how partners could collectively support the implementation of the 'Mahinda Chinthana' vision of 'Balanced Regional Development with Diversity' - the intention to transform all regions to ensure every household has the opportunity to benefit from economic development.

UN Resident Coordinator in Sri Lanka Subinay Nandy highlighted the opportunity presented by the end of the war and the strength of the economy, and encouraged partners to jointly look for new and bold ways of improving the lives of those that continue to live in hardship.

He noted that available data on per capita income, health and education shows lower levels in the north and the east when compared to national averages, and also drew attention to pockets

of vulnerability elsewhere in the country most noticeably among plantation workers, female headed households, the disabled and elderly.

The IPS Executive Director stated that the Institute prepared the Millennium Development Goals Country Report 2008/2009 and in the process of preparing the National Human Development Report for Sri Lanka and always facilitate discussions and debates on poverty and human development.

Presenting new data revealing a strong causal link between health indicators and multi-dimensional poverty, IPS went on to advocate for a sustained focus on pervasive issues such as malnutrition, and increased attention to modern day challenges presented by non-communicable diseases and an aging population.

The full day event took place in the IPS auditorium and was webcast live. Speakers included representatives from Government, the Jaffna University, the private sector and experts from the regional and Sri Lanka country offices of ILO, UNDP, UNICEF and WFP. Datuk Dr Jayasooria from the University Kebangsaan Malaysia delivered the keynote regional address.