

Opening Remarks

The PEP as a Gathering of Brains in Developing Poverty Reduction Strategies*

*John Cockburn***

Welcome to everyone and thank you very much for coming.

First of all, I would like to highlight one key aspect of this conference. This is the fourth general meeting of the PEP network. So far, this is the biggest meeting of the network, with about 150 participants from 40 countries around the world. These include countries from South East Asia, South Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America. Indeed, I am very happy to have a network of this type where we can have interactions with researchers from around the world, including with experts from Europe and North America.

We are also happy to note that over one third of the participants are female. And although this is not yet quite up to an ideal proportion of 50 percent of the participants, still we find this to be extremely noteworthy and we are quite happy to have a gender balance of this level.

I would also like to underline the fact that over one fifth of the participants are under the age of 30. This is very important for the capacity building of this type, bringing in young researchers and involving them in the network.

* An edited and recast version of the speech delivered during the opening ceremony of the 4th Poverty and Economic Policy (PEP) General Meeting.

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At this point, let me acknowledge the presence of certain key participants. For each of the three sub-networks that Celia mentioned earlier, there is a steering committee that provides scientific guidance to the network leader. For the CBMS network directed by Celia Reyes, for instance, the members of the steering committee are Momar Sylla from Senegal, Ponciano Intal from the Philippines, Louis Marie Asselin from Quebec, and Martha Melesse from IDRC. The MPIA network led by Bernard Decaluwe has a steering committee composed of Touhami Abdelkhalek from Morocco, Ramon Clarete from the Philippines, Marzia Fontana from England and Randy Spence from the IDRC. Finally, the steering committee of the PMMA network headed by Jean-Yves Duclos has Swapna Mukhopadhyay, Chris Scott and Evan Due from the IDRC as members.

We have 17 representatives from IDRC which, I think, suggests a strong vote of confidence on the PEP network. From the social and economic equity division, Brent Herbert Copley, the director, will be here in a few days. Ditto with the two regional directors of the South East Asia and South Asia divisions. We also have a number of donor and partner representatives in attendance. We thank them all for coming to and participating in the meeting.

With regard to the resource persons, we have an impressive group. Their thoughts and ideas provide our network with some fresh insights. We also have government officials, both from Sri Lanka and abroad, who are willing to share their own perspectives. And of course, we have the most important participants—the researchers from all the regions of the world. Again, our sincere gratitude for coming.

In the next few days, the meeting will highlight final reports, four sets of new proposals from the MPIA network, 15 new proposals and 16 reports from the PMMA network, among others. We will also have a training workshop during the last few days of the meeting.

The 150 proposals that we have received for this meeting are from among the very best of the developing world's researchers. We also have the very best of the resource persons and steering committee

members. So, this should enable us to do something extremely powerful in finding ways to reduce poverty in the world.

Finally, let me end by thanking the Institute of Policy Studies which has done a wonderful job in organizing this meeting and in getting all the logistics ready for the training workshop scheduled for the last few days of the week under the guidance of Ganga Tilakaratna and Nilushani Karunaratna. Thanks also to our partner, the Angelo King Institute led by the CBMS team of Celia Reyes and Badette Mandap. And of course, to the International Development Research Centre, without whose support, none of these will be made possible. They have given us powerful tools to be able to get together some of the best researchers in the developing world.

Thank you.