

**Speech by Mr. Melchoir Lengsfled, Executive Director – HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation**

Topic: **India's Development Experiences and its Global Relevance**

Venue: The Claridges Hotel, New Delhi

Date: March 1, 2018

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure and privilege to meeting with all of you tonight, at the occasion of the **10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Intercooperation Social Development India**.

As you can see from the invitation, I have been asked to speak about **India's Development experiences and global relevance**.

Let me be more modes and rather share a few questions, as contribution to our conversation tonight.

***(Part I - From poverty alleviation to addressing new challenges)***

I came first time to India in the year 1996 on a study assignment to work in the Indo-Swiss Participatory Watershed Development, posted in Gulbarga, a town in northern Karnataka.

What struck me then was the incredible drive and energy with the Indian people was working day-by-day, to build a better life for their families.

The achievements that India has made are impressive:

Over the past 3 decades, **per capita income has increased four-fold**. Hundreds of millions of people have **graduated out of poverty**.

Substantial reforms have made India a **better place to do business**. A part of the Indian economy is **fully integrated into the global** economy, and **spearheading innovation** in sectors like ICT, biotechnology, or renewable energies.

While there are impressive achievements, important challenges stay ahead:

**Still several hundred millions of people live below the poverty line.**

While **deep agricultural transformations** are taking place, the agriculture sector is under stress. **Large-scale migration from the country-side** poses massive challenges for urban centres. Particularly the number of **youth leaving for cities** has dramatically increased.

**When we asked farmers** during our field trip to Uttarakhand, if their children would also become farmers, the answers clearly showed that parents wished a different future for their own kids.

At the same time, **India is not creating the number of jobs** that are needed for its youth – not a small task with 12 million new entrants to the job market in India each year

**Climate change is** adding a further challenge to development prospects, and is set to become **one of the greatest challenges** to further progress.

The latest Economic Survey, released by Government of India on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2018 says that due to climate change, **agricultural productivity in India is expected to reduce by 30%**. India is **both a victim** of global climate change as well as, today, an **important contributor of CO2** to the global climate balance sheet. The narrative India is choosing on climate change is having a profound impact on global climate conversations.

→Economic growth and income distribution, massive rural – urban migration, job prospects for youth, environmental and climate policies: **These are just some of the challenges** India is confronted with today.

Admittedly, it sounds like a rather traditional analysis.

As you all bring deep and diversified perspectives to the table, it would be great to hear where *YOU* identify the **most important development challenges for India** – and **which ways you see to address them?**

### ***(Part II – Addressing inequalities and the role of NGOs)***

**India has moved** from being an aid recipient to becoming a provider of international assistance. Today, **India has a growing foreign aid programme** with a strong focus in South Asia, but it also reaches out to countries in Africa.

**While exporting many of its technological achievements** to other countries and regions, India is **internally challenged** to address chronic poverty and growing inequality. **Like in many other** middle-income countries **the gap between** those who benefit from economic development and those who stay behind **is growing**.

This is a phenomenon we are confronted with all over the world – to the extent that the **SDGs strongly emphasize the need to combat inequalities**.

And it has **profoundly changed the way** in which we work: **moving from providing discrete solutions** for specific challenges **to a focus on the root causes** of poverty and inequality and working **towards systemic change**.

**We contribute to strengthening civil society** to voice their rights and interests vis a vis the duty bearers.

**India** – being the **largest democracy** in the world - **has proven** in its development path that economic, social and political **empowerment can go hand in hand** and reinforce each other.

ICSD has **recognized and internalized this view**. Its vision is an “inclusive, gender sensitive sustainable development”. In its work, it balances economic and social development themes. The role of civil society is increasingly important to ensure that the development pathways chosen are balanced, sustainable and inclusive.

Now, **what do you think?**

What is the most effective **way to address inequalities, in India** and globally?

**And what is the contribution** that **development cooperation can make** to address these inequalities?

***(Part III– ICSD and Helvetas; its partners and alliances)***

It is a privilege to see that we have been part of India’s success story for many decades. Intercooperation started working in India as an implementing agency of SDC in 1984. Though the programme has been quite large at times, it remained - In typical Swiss fashion - largely anonymous, working close to the ground, supporting government and civil society partners with its technical and managerial competence.

While initial programmes were targeted to **watershed management in Dryland** areas, **irrigation system** rehabilitation, **livestock improvement** programmes, the programme later **shifted towards capacity and institution-building of government** and civil society actors and private sector development.

It was also in India where it developed its **first climate change programmes**.

**But not only our approaches** have changed, **also the role** of development cooperation in India is evolving rapidly: **In 2012, the government of India** took the bold decision of **saying no** to bilateral aid from most countries.

Today, **only a handful of bilateral** agencies are active in India.

It was only a few years earlier **that** “Intercooperation Social Development” emerged as **an independent national organisation** – which **marked the beginning** of a **close and successful partnership** between Helvetas and ICSD.

**Earlier this week, I visited** a programme where we work in partnership with local farmer groups as well as **national and international companies** (like NatureBioFoods and Mars), who are responsible for an important part of the extension work.

**National research institutes and international standard initiatives** (like the Sustainable Rice programme or the Alliance for Water Stewardship) help to validate approaches, work on policy aspects and crowd in other private sector actors – **while ICSD** contributes specialised advice and support.

**This multi-country programme** supports farmers to **produce and market for instance organic basmati rice**, improve **water use efficiency** while **reducing methane emissions** from agriculture. **Working with Indian private companies**, the project facilitates farmers' access to domestic and international markets that **place a premium on sustainable production practices**.

With a view to **scaling up and sustainability**, from the onset, **funding for development and sustainability aspects** is contributed to **more than 50%** by the private sector.

This project is a good example of **how we attempt to work today**: in **multi-stakeholder** partnerships, **including research and private sector along with government partners**, and addressing challenges in a multi-dimensional way.

The programme is also a strong example of the partnership between ICSD and HELVETAS. Today, Intercooperation Social Development India is **an independent member** of the HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation family, **sharing common values** – and it is a pleasure to see **how we complement each other for greater impact**.

**Helvetas works in 30 countries** with a **significant presence in the region**, namely in Nepal, Bhutan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Myanmar.

We are also **a member of Alliance 2015** – a group of independent European NGOs with presence in **85 countries** and a programme volume of around **1 bn USD** per year.

**ICSD is well integrated** into this family, and **we appreciate how ICSD is steadily diversifying** its collaboration with an increasing number of national and international partners.

**You are here tonight because** you all are, in different ways, **particularly important partners of ICSD!**

And it is particularly this diversity which brings me to my **third and last question**:

**What kind of alliances and strategies do you think are most effective to address today's' development challenges – globally and in India?**

I have - of course - only sketched a small part of the large canvas of today's development challenges in India, and globally.

We unite tonight to celebrate the 10 years of ICSD. I would would like, once more, to congratulate the Board and management of ICSD for the achievements of the past decade.

India is on a deeply impressive trajectory.

- **Development challenges and most effective ways to address** them are key concerns for all of us.
- The **role of development cooperation is profoundly changing** – how can we contribute most effectively to **address the persisting inequalities**?
- Which **alliances and partnerships** help us on this journey?

I hope that these few reflections can contribute to launch our dialogue how you analyse these **deep transformations and which lessons** you derive for the future – **in India and beyond**.

Thank you very much for the attention and opportunity.