

Preface

Our world is richer than ever before, but it is also marked by enormous inequalities, both within and between countries. The average annual income of someone living in the world's richest country, Luxembourg, is more than one hundred times larger than that of the average citizen of Sierra Leone, one of the world's poorest. Such big differences in living standards should be a matter of great concern, because they reflect serious inequalities in life opportunities. This calls for a robust policy response at both the national and international levels, so that all countries can achieve the Millennium Development Goals and other agreed development objectives.

Trends in inequality between countries have varied. In the 1950s and 1960s, developing countries experienced strong and sustained economic growth, almost across the board. Since the 1980s, however, a trend towards increasing divergence has set in, with a limited group of countries, most of them in Asia, achieving rapid economic growth and gaining from more open global markets, while much of the rest of the developing world has faced economic instability and made few gains in human well-being. The process of globalization has not yet closed the income gap between poor and rich countries. On the contrary, as emphasized in the present *Survey*, the way in which world markets operate has been an important contributing factor to the rise in global income inequality. Richer countries, for instance, tend to have preferential access to capital markets, to attract more foreign direct investment, and to be more resilient than poorer countries in responding to shifts in global commodity markets.

We will not live up to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights without reducing global inequality. Such efforts can promote growth and stability, and can help avert economic and social crises and even political instability. I urge Member States and the international community to focus more concerted attention on this issue, so that people and States alike can reach their full potential. And I commend the analysis and suggestions contained in this *Survey* to a wide global readership.



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