

Foreword

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In the present era development cooperation faces the gigantic problems of the increasing burden of debts and failing food policies in large parts of the developing world. At the same time, there is a growing awareness among developing countries that western-modelled development programmes are no panacea for the problems that confront them. The all too dominant Western economic models do leave little room for endogenous development, and do not take fully into account the socio-cultural history of the nations concerned. Within the field of development cooperation then, it is time for introspection. The concern for the poor and deprived of this world should not lead to reducing these people to economic figures. They are citizens and bearers of cultural traditions. Improvement of living conditions, even to the point of salvage from starvation, has to include freeing options for a more culture-bound development from material constraints.

The discussions and processes alluded to above at first glance remind of those prevailing in former colonies at the time of the emergence of nationalist movements. These movements questioned the legitimacy of the colonial powers and emphasized the identity of the indigenous peoples. A study of the articles included in this volume reveals that indeed, unfortunately, one important theme has not lost its significance. It is the theme of the threat to communication between East and West, or North and South for that matter, which is posed by ethnocentrism, especially in a context of an unequal distribution of power, whether in the political sense as during the colonial period, or in the economic sense as in our world today. If Prof. Heesterman concludes with regard to the topic of unity and diversity that the European analogy proved to be defective during the colonial period, we may add that there is still cause to be critical of applying European notions to the developing world.

As we are dealing with developing countries as independent sovereign states any interaction should be based on respect and understanding. By their warnings against stereotyping and their insight in socio-cultural historical

developments scholars can contribute to this understanding, thereby saving us from the dangerous course of ethnocentric policies. In view of the fact that the development cooperation between The Netherlands on the one hand, and India and Indonesia on the other, comprises much more than economic activities and involves itself also with aspects as the improvement of the status of women, the relationship between culture and development, communication, and conservation of the natural environment, I am particularly pleased to write the Foreword for this book. I am aware of the fact that development cooperation forms only part of much broader relations between the Netherlands and the aforementioned countries. It is my conviction that the notions contained in this book and in the Netherlands development cooperation policy should have an impact on the entire relationship between the Netherlands and these countries. The durable and fruitful cooperation between people and institutions of all three countries underlines the vision of development cooperation as a joint endeavour towards a common goal, in which cultural differences are not ignored but positively appraised.



Truck with anti-malaria posters at the Anti-Malaria-Exhibition, New Delhi (Courtesy of Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen)