

CITIZENSHIP AWARD OF THE P&V FOUNDATION 2021

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FOUNDATION P&V

*emancipation participation
citizenship solidarity*



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THE CITIZENSHIP AWARD

2021



◀ Olivier Servais

Jessy Siongers ▶



Olivier Servais and Jessy Siongers, Presidents of the P&V Foundation

Olivier Servais is a professor of anthropology and dean of the Faculty of Economic, Political, Social and Communication Sciences at the University of Louvain-la-Neuve.

He heads the international journal *Social Compass*, SAGE, London. He also teaches at l'Université Saint-Louis-Bruxelles and at l'Institut des Arts de Diffusion in Louvain-la-Neuve. He's co-founder of the Carta Academica Network which defends the commitment of academics in the public debate.

In addition to his academic career, he is also active in civil society. He has served as chairman of the Pluralist Scouts and Guides and is administrator of various social and cultural institutions.

Jessy Siongers is coordinator of the Knowledge Center for Culture and Media Participation at Ghent University and co-supervisor of the Youth Research Platform for the Free University of Brussels (VUB). She contributed to the COVID-19 Supplement of *Children's Worlds*, an international survey

of children's well-being in corona times, and is co-editor of different books on young people, among others: *Youth in the Crucible. Political engagement of the young in Europe* (Routledge).

She is also an editorial member of the *Tijdschrift voor Jeugd en Kinderrechten* (Journal for Youth and Children's Rights), and national correspondent for the *Youth Wiki* (EU), an online database on national structures, policies and actions in support of young people in Europe.



The Citizenship Prize rewards people who put into practice the Foundation's objectives and ideals in an exemplary way by promoting a society of active, committed citizens who stand up for the welfare and happiness of others and who contribute to a more just, tolerant and respectful society for all.

The Foundation has asked a panel of 37 persons with different backgrounds (media, politics, economics, culture, social work, science) to nominate candidates for the Citizenship Award. This resulted in a list of 21 candidates. The names of the candidates who were most often nominated by this panel were gathered in a shortlist with 10 candidates. The panel convened virtually in June to select the laureate for 2021 out of this shortlist (jury).

The jury chose to reward **Jean Drèze**.

Born in 1959 in the city of Leuven, Jean Drèze is an Indian economist and activist of Belgian origin. He has worked on several development issues facing India such as hunger, famine, gender inequality, social security, child health and education.

His co-authors include Nobel laureate in economics Amartya Sen, with whom he wrote on famine, Nicholas Stern, with whom he wrote on reforming policies when market prices are distorted, and Nobel laureate in economics Angus Deaton. He is currently Honorary Professor at the Delhi School of Economics and Visiting Professor in the Department of Economics at Ranchi University in India.

The combination of extensive fieldwork, qualitative analysis of daily life and poverty, with quantitative work, makes his work distinctive within economics. Jean Drèze still lives and works under the same conditions as his respondents as to be able to really understand them. When he was 20 years old, when he first came to New Delhi to complete his PhD, he adopted a lifestyle of voluntary simplicity as close as possible to the villagers.

Drèze is known for his commitment to social justice, both in India and internationally. Besides his outstanding academic work, he has been actively involved in many social movements, including the peace movement, the Right to Information Campaign which led to the Right to

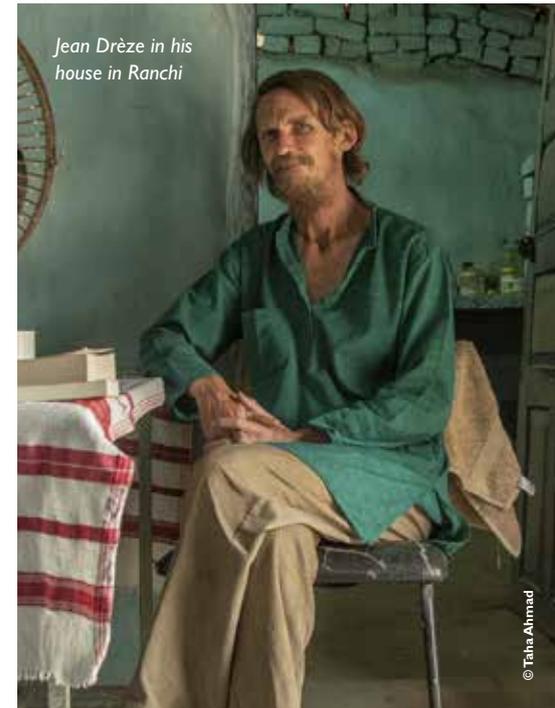
Information Act in India, and the right to food campaign in India. Actions that have effectively led to change and have lasting impact. He is also known as one of the architects of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act which guarantees labour rights and social security, although his contribution is overrated according to Drèze. This marks his modesty, according to others.

Jean Drèze has a great sense of responsibility and need to get involved in society, grafted onto the belief that he must put his own values into practice. More than a vision for the future, his journey and life mission to fight against social inequalities are inspiring for many people in Belgium and around the world.

Exemplary citizenship is what this award wants to highlight. Jean Drèzes commitment has improved the lives of many Indian men and women. With regard to his commitment against division, exclusion and polarization, he perfectly embodies the values defended by our Foundation: solidarity, emancipation, citizenship and participation. Jean Drèze was given the opportunity to support a project that is in line

with the mission and values of our foundation. He chose Mobile Creches.

Due to the corona crisis the award ceremony was postponed. Check our website or social media channels to be informed of the new date.



Jean Drèze in his house in Ranchi

THE P&V FOUNDATION

The P&V Insurance Group, which originated from the cooperative movement, established the P&V Foundation in 2000 and is its main sponsor. The Foundation operates in total independence and its mission is to fight the social exclusion of young people. Based on the most important values of the social economy, the Foundation emphasises active participation, independence and social responsibility among young people. The P&V Foundation was recognised as a foundation for public utility in 2005.



FOUNDATION P&V

*emancipation participation
citizenship solidarity*



A FOUNDATION AT YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICE!

The cornerstone of the P&V Foundation is the fight against the exclusion of young people. The Foundation wants to guide young people regarding different aspects of social life. By giving them the necessary opportunities and by actively involving them, it helps them take their lives into their own hands.

The objective of the P&V Foundation is therefore to provide young people with a range of resources that appeal to their talents and convictions. It wants to encourage young people to show solidarity, to develop their sense of citizenship by helping them to express their ideas, to cooperate, to respect each other and to increase their sense of responsibility. Because young people are the adults of tomorrow, the P&V Foundation aims to increase their opportunities for development by means of projects young people select themselves and in which they participate.



CONNECTING YOU(TH)

Do we still meet or do we live mostly in our own bubbles? In recent years, we have seen a growing gap in society, especially depending on the level and type of education. We don't live in the same neighbourhoods, we don't go to the same sports clubs or schools, we don't meet in the same places, and our priorities and interests are different.

All of this has negative consequences for social cohesion and the possibility of building a society to which everyone can relate. According to some, the current coronavirus crisis threatens to increase this polarization.

Moreover, during the corona crisis, the personal growth and identity development of young people came under pressure. Research shows that social contacts and support can be important predictors of resilience and improved recovery after crises.

With its new multi-year project Connecting You(th), the P&V Foundation wants to combine the need for social contacts and exchanges

of young people with the societal need for diversified contacts, encounters, and mutual understanding. In this way, it is possible to promote not only mental well-being, but also societal well-being and cohesion in society.

The project will consist of two components: a call for projects and a youth forum.





CALL FOR PROJECTS

The P&V Foundation has launched the 'Connecting You(th)' call for projects to facilitate mutual encounters between young people and / or the achievement of common goals.

The P&V Foundation thus seeks to support:

(1) projects that stimulate real encounters between different (groups of) young people, who really learn to listen to each other's needs on the basis of equality, who reflect on the assumptions and prejudices of the different groups, ... In other words, projects that work towards a better understanding and acceptance of the "other" through meetings, discussions, social contacts.

And/or

(2) initiatives that look for and work on the common needs, wishes, problems ... of various (groups of) young people (instead of looking at what divides us, looking for what unites us). In other words, initiatives which go concretely in search of common objectives and which undertake actions together to achieve these objectives.

The selection of the winning projects by our youth forum will be announced in the spring of 2022.



YOUTH FORUM

Following the launch of the 'Connecting You(th)' call for projects, the P&V Foundation initiated a youth forum, so as to offer twenty young people aged 16 to 22, from diverse backgrounds, the opportunity to gain experience in active citizenship.

The young people will meet over a one-and-a-half-year journey to follow the entire selection and evaluation process of the call for projects. This forum allows them to experiment with the participatory method, civic engagement and to acquire skills and autonomy, thus bringing together the keys to citizen participation.

The first meeting of our youth forum took place during the weekend of 22-24 October 2021. The process will end with the organization of a final conference in 2023 presenting the most important results and recommendations of our youth forum to bridge divides between young people in society.



A CITIZENSHIP AWARD WITH AN EYE FOR VALUES

In order to emphasise and add resonance to its ideal of citizenship, the P&V Foundation organises its annual Citizenship award, which is awarded to Belgian or foreign persons, initiatives or organisations that have contributed to an open, democratic and tolerant society in an exemplary way.

2005

Fadéla Amara (Ni Putes Ni Soumises) and Job Cohen (Mayor of Amsterdam) were the first to receive the Citizenship Award in 2005.



2005

2006

In 2006 the prize was awarded to singer, writer and sculptor Wannes Van de Velde and director duo Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne.



2006

2007

Senegalese human rights activist Khady Koita, president of the European Network for the Prevention of Female Genital Mutilation and author of Mutilée, received the award in 2007.



2007

2008

In 2008 the prize was awarded to two ladies: Jeanne Devos, human rights activist and founder of the National Domestic Workers' Movement (NDWM), and Simone Süsskind, president of Actions dans la Méditerranée.



2008

2009

In 2009 two Belgian organisations were rewarded for their efforts to promote intercultural dialogue and awareness of citizenship: Kif Kif and Les Territoires de la Mémoire.



2009

2010

In 2010 the panel selected a duo that was awarded for its endeavours to promote the reintegration of prisoners. Jacqueline Rousseau founded Adeppi (Atelier d'Education Permanente pour Personnes Incarcérées) in 1981 and Guido Verschueren has provided humane leadership at the prison in Leuven for 30 years.



2010

2011

In 2011 the Citizenship Prize was awarded to Stéphane Hessel, diplomat, human rights activist and author of *Indignez-vous!* (Time for Outrage!), which was sold over four million copies worldwide.



2011

2012

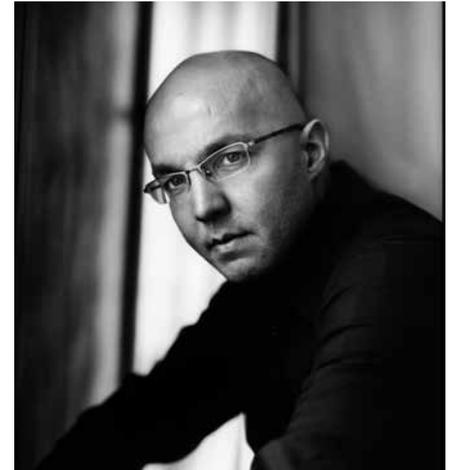
In 2012, the P&V Foundation awarded its 8th prize to Dr Izzeldin Abuelaish, author of the book "I Shall Not Hate"



2012

2013

Jan Goossens, the artistic director of the KVS (the Brussels Royal Flemish Theatre), received the award in 2013. He has led the KVS to an urban and contemporary theatre, focusing on diversity in his own country and on cultural wealth elsewhere in the world.



2013

2014

In 2014, the Citizenship Award was given out to two people who give, on a daily basis, opportunities to socially vulnerable people to participate in society: Reinhilde Declerck, actress and instigator of the Theater Company «Tutti Fratelli» and Ho Chul Chantraine, Founder of Agricover, a cooperative company with social and ecological objectives.



2014

2015

The Citizenship Award 2015 has been accorded to Eric Domb, founder of Pairi Daiza, and Frans De Clerck, co-founder of Triodos bank Belgium.



2015

2016

In 2016, Michel Claise, investigating magistrate specialised in financial crime, and Jan Nolf, honorary justice of the peace and critical observer, were the designated laureates for the 12th citizenship award.



2016

2017

In 2017, the Citizenship Prize was awarded to Paul Collier, professor of economics at the University of Oxford and influential thinker on migration and development economics.



2017

2018

Michel Pradolini received the Citizenship Award in 2018. He is the driving force behind and chairman of the widely supported social football club City Pirates.



2018

2019

In 2019, the Citizenship Prize was awarded to journalists Virginie Nguyen and Geert Mak. Two laureates who bring out a broader story and vision of society in an accessible way, by means of testimonials and portraits of ordinary people.



2019

2020

In 2020, the Citizenship Prize was awarded to a female journalist and filmmaker for her active and militant citizenship: Waad al-Kateab.



2020

THE LAUREATE

JEAN DRÈZE

JEAN DRÈZE, AN ACTION ORIENTED ECONOMIST

On 30 November, 62-year-old Jean Drèze will receive the Citizenship Award 2021 from the Foundation P&V. Drèze was born in Leuven but has been an Indian citizen for almost twenty years. His work as an economist is recognised worldwide as decisive in understanding hunger and exclusion, and in India it helped realise a set of basic rights for the poor.

By Gie Goris



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'Word has it that most people are self-interested. At least that is what an unsuspecting reader of mainstream economic theory might conclude.' This is how Jean Drèze opens his essay on Development and Public-Spiritidness. Our economy is – in theory at least – based on individuals who rationally use "rational self-interest" as their prime motivation, but Drèze believes that real people also act for the public interest and the common good, based on arguments that are at least as rational. He refuses the idea that he himself is the embodiment of that public-spiritidness. In fact, he prefers to say as little about himself as possible. That is to his credit, but it is not entirely justified.

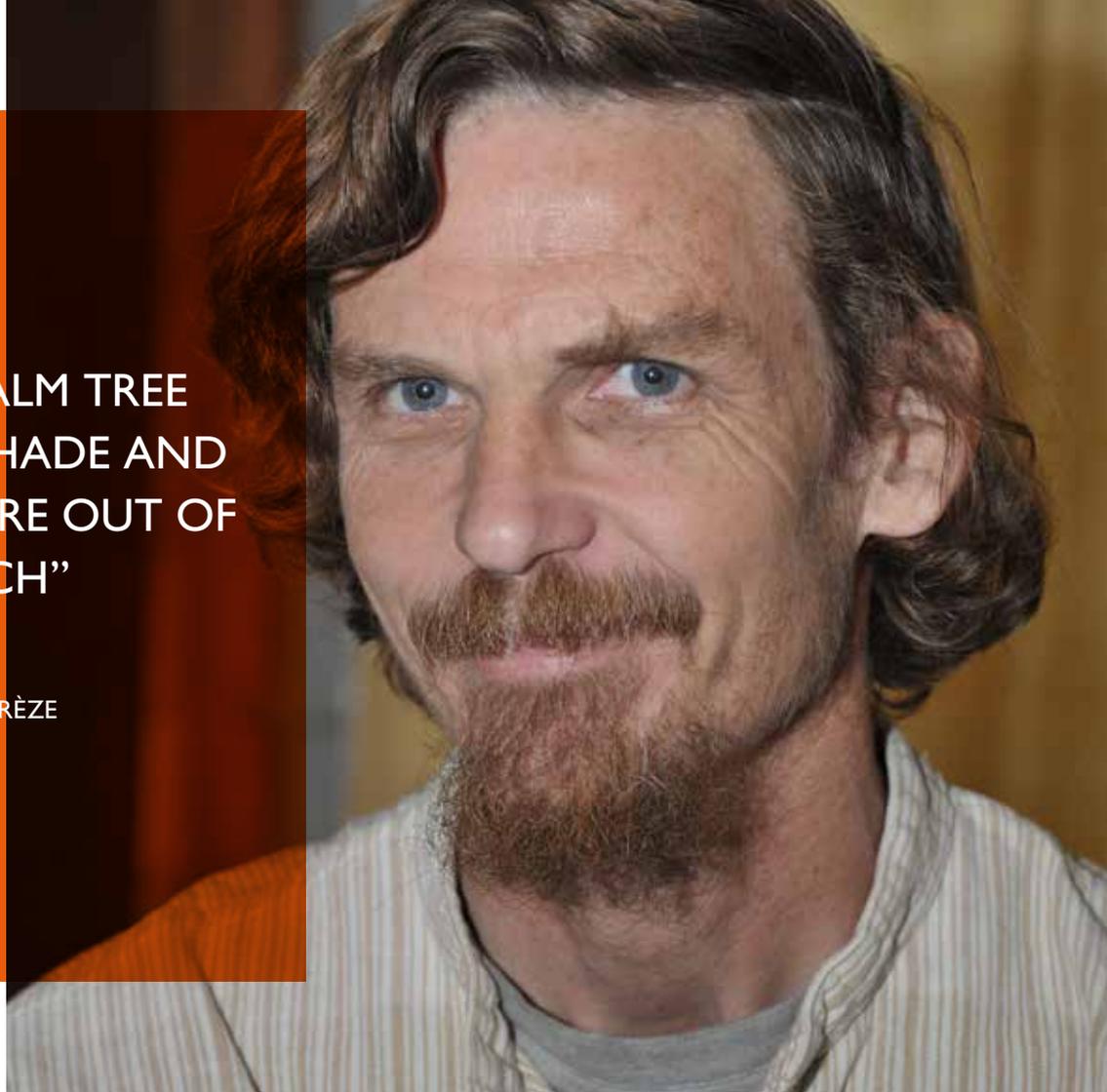
Amartya Sen thinks so too. He knows Jean Drèze well. When Sen was awarded the Nobel Prize for Economics in 1998, he said among other things: 'By the mid-1980s, I was collaborating extensively with Jean Drèze, a young Belgian economist of extraordinary skill

and remarkable dedication. My understanding of hunger and deprivation owes a great deal to his insights and investigations, and so does my recent work on development, which has been mostly done jointly with him.' And with the typical wit and self-deprecation shared by Sen and Drèze, the Nobel laureate added: 'Indeed, my collaboration with Jean has been extremely fruitful for me, not only because I have learned so much from his imaginative initiatives and insistent thoroughness, but also because it is hard to beat an arrangement for joint work whereby Jean does most of the work whereas I get a lot of the credit.'

The same sense of humour transpires when I ask Jean Drèze how he feels about being awarded the Citizenship Award. 'I was amused', he chuckles, 'because it seemed ironic to get a citizenship award from Belgium after having ditched Belgian citizenship. I understand, of course, that the award is not for Belgian

“A TALL PALM TREE
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JEAN DRÈZE



citizenship but for good citizenship in the sense of a certain kind of public-spiritedness. I am not sure that I deserve so much appreciation, but I will try to be worthy of it from now at least.'

Learning from the homeless

Jean Drèze was born in Leuven, in 1959. His father founded the Centre for Operations Research and Econometrics in Leuven and later moved it to the Université Catholique de Louvain-la-Neuve. Jean studied mathematical economics at Essex University and then went to India, where he wrote a PhD on economic cost-benefit analysis. Since 1979, Drèze has resided in India, except for a period in the late 1980s when he worked in London with Amartya Sen and taught at the London School of Economics. During that period, Jean Drèze lived in a squat on Clapham Road, together with homeless people. 'There I learned what solidarity really means,' he notes. 'One evening there was a fire in one of the rooms. I immediately ran to find a phone to notify the fire brigade, but a couple of homeless people saw that a man was sleeping it off on the other side of the fire. They literally went through the fire to save him. I don't think I

could have ever done that.'

In 2002 Jean Drèze exchanged his Belgian passport for Indian citizenship. He taught in Delhi, Allahabad and Ranchi; and he did a lot of field research, especially in Jharkhand, Bihar; Chhattisgarh and Uttar Pradesh.

Research that serves hundreds of millions of people

His research but also his activism contributed significantly to several major social programmes in India. For example, the Supreme Court ruled on 28 November 2001 that every government or government-aided primary school had to





offer all pupils a free cooked meal every day. Drèze had carried out important research for that case and was actively involved in the campaign that led to this order and later, in 2013, to India's National Food Security Act.

'In the end, it was about food security, not just a midday meal,' he says. 'The Food Security Act has three main components. There are the warm school meals. 120 million primary school children now enjoy these meals on a daily basis, and on top of that a lot of poor women are employed as cooks. These free meals have led to more enrolment in school, especially of girls, better attendance and better school results.' Then there are the subsidised food rations through a public distribution system. And there are the maternity benefits for all pregnant women, which number some 25 million annually. The broad National Food Security Act reaches a total of about 800 million people, making it perhaps the largest social programme in the world.

In addition to fighting for food security, Drèze became widely known as one of the architects of the 2005 National Rural Employment

Guarantee Act (NREGA). This act entitles any rural family that cannot find work or an income to 100 days of employment in a public project. The work is done at the minimum wage and that wage must be paid within fifteen days. 'My role in the formulation and realisation of NREGA is grossly exaggerated by the media,' says Drèze, and I understand he would greatly appreciate this clarification to be included in this portrait.

Every year, more than 50 million Indian families can boost their family income thanks to this law. And 60 per cent of those taking up work are women. 'Importantly', Drèze adds, 'the implementation of this law also creates upward pressure for market wages in rural areas. In this way, NREGA not only provides additional paid work, but also better paid work throughout the year.'

Looking beyond the campus

Drèze is not only a scientist. He is also a sharp and empathetic observer of the mercilessly hard and divided society he lives in. In the introduction to his latest book, *Sense & Solidarity* (2017), he



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describes the reality of those at the bottom of Indian society having to survive: 'Around the corner from my office at Ranchi University in eastern India is a wide avenue that leads into the city, called Kanke Road. If you go there at the crack of dawn, you will see something you may never forget: hundreds of young men, many emaciated and dishevelled, pushing bicycles loaded with more than two hundred kilograms of smuggled coal. Under the cover of darkness, they have walked twenty or thirty kilometres with this stupendous load to sell it in Ranchi and earn just enough to feed their families.'

To that image he adds a quote from George Orwell (Down the Mine, 1937), which points to his acute awareness of inequality and privilege: 'You and I and the editor of the Times Lit. Supp., and the poets and the Archbishop of Canterbury and Comrade X, author of Marxism for Infants – all of us really owe the comparative decency of our lives to poor drudges underground, blackened to the eyes, with their throats full of coal dust, driving their shovels forward with arms and belly muscles of steel.'

'Ideally, economists should be found not only in universities, governments, and the corporate sector; but also among the public at large – working with civic organisations, trade unions, political parties, alternative media, the peace movement, or just freelance,' Jean Drèze writes elsewhere. But, he continues, 'of course, economists generally like their work to be well paid, so they tend to gravitate towards the centres of privilege and power.'

Research for action

When I spoke with Jean Drèze at the end of October, there was no sign of power or privilege. He sits in short, cotton sleeves - it is at least 25°C - in a simple room, which fortunately does have good Wi-Fi. Drèze actually lives in Ranchi, Jharkhand, but is now temporarily in Jagdalpur, Chhattisgarh. Every three or four months, he spends time with his partner, Bela Bhatia, who is a lawyer in one of the poorest and most polarised regions of India. Behind him, the whitewashed walls slowly turn ochre, and when I inquire about his successes and achievements, I imagine Drèze himself blushing behind a friendly smile.



do justice to reality in India – with its enormously rich diversity, but also its yawning inequalities – you need more than evidence: data, statistics or RCTs. The latter is more or less the holy grail of today's development economics: Randomised Controlled Trials, in which certain interventions are tried out while it is investigated in similar contexts what happens without these interventions. Esther Duflo and her husband Abhijit Banerjee were awarded the Nobel Prize in Economics for it in 2019. 'I am not against the use of data and RCTs,' says Drèze, 'but it is just one source of understanding.' He himself has long opted for action-oriented research that also attaches importance to experience: the knowledge and insights of those involved, but also the experience that the researcher gains from the reality under investigation. 'For example, conversations with elderly widows help to understand what can go wrong in the implementation of the government's – meagre and inadequate – pension plans, for example. If you go by statistics, 5 per cent of unreachd people in the target group seems a small, and perhaps acceptable, error in the system. When you have spent time with those affected, you think differently.'

He is one of the world's most respected development economists and has published ground-breaking work together with Nobel Prize winners such as Amartya Sen and Angus Deaton, or with leading economists such as Nicolas Stern. That says a lot about the rigorous seriousness and academic quality of Drèze's own research. Are social programmes like the Food Security Act or Right to Work perhaps «his Nobel Prizes», I ask. Jean Drèze laughs. 'Those laws are not my achievement, they are the result of broad collaborations and sustained

campaigns. I may be more visible than others because I get space in national media, but that is irrelevant.' Moreover, unlike the «thoroughbred intellectuals» I refer to, he sees himself more as a man of applied research, with a focus on concrete change. He is a passionate advocate of research for action: economic research that wants to improve the world. This is no less demanding academically, but socially more fruitful. He hopes.

According to Jean Drèze, for an economist to

In a footnote to the above quotation about the lure of high wages, Drèze notes that even economists who choose a simple lifestyle may not escape the gravitation to the centres of power: 'A well-known economist tends to be bombarded with invitations to deliver keynote addresses at international conferences, release books authored by influential people, give memorial lectures, advise governments, and join countless boards. Declining these invitations, however unwelcome, is often difficult. That leaves little time for engaging with different circles.' This is undoubtedly a reflection on his own struggle with time and priorities, as he is a «well-known economist» who is asked for anything and everything. Yet Drèze manages to be in the field a lot. Amongst the people. And above all: as much as possible like the people he is working for: the hundreds of millions of poor; the Dalits and Adivasi, the excluded. 'There is probably no country in the world where the poor majority is pushed aside with such ease and indifference as in India', he observes with regret. And so inclusion, justice and equal opportunity must be worked harder for here than anywhere else.

Eggs, caste and class

'Did you have an egg for breakfast this morning?' The question with which I open the interview may sound like small talk, but not to Jean Drèze. He smiles: 'No, not this morning. But it happens regularly that I eat an egg for breakfast, yes.' And then – as he knows what I am getting at – 'I am a vegetarian, but that doesn't stop me from eating eggs. By the way, it is only a small group of upper-caste Hindus who object to that.' In a number of Indian states, this objection



is strong enough though to keep eggs off the lunch menu of millions of schoolchildren. Jean Drèze understands the concerns of vegans and animal rights activists. 'I am not going to defend industrial chicken farming,' he says. 'But on the other hand, I don't think you should or can protect animal rights by attacking the quality of poor children's food.' Ultimately, he believes, opposition to eggs in school meals is a matter of caste and class. Those who belong to the privileged upper layer of the country can afford to ignore the needs of the poor majority.

What Jean Drèze finds so important about the struggle to get eggs on the menu or cooked food on the refectory table is not only its nutritional value, but also its social importance. 'The opposition of upper-caste parents to Dalit women preparing the food has faded away. So has the resistance to children of different castes eating together. This is a lasting social gain,' he believes.

When asked how he became involved in the big campaigns for food security and the right to work, he does not really have an answer. The same hesitant silence follows when asked why

he has chosen such an outspoken frugal lifestyle. This time, those silences are not a matter of modesty, but express the conviction that 'shared experiences are much more important in one's choices and trajectory than individual introspection'. He was committed before he came to India, he says. A legacy of the 1970s generation: 'I got the belief in the possibility to change the world for the better from home, and that grew throughout high school, thanks to many conversations and actions with fellow students and good teachers.' In India, he initially worked on the campus of the Indian Statistical Institute, but with some friends he was also involved in social work in a nearby slum. So it seemed obvious to him to move to that slum and share the lives of the people with whom he felt so involved. That's how choices are made: by doing things.

I am not an outsider

Along the way, Jean Drèze also came to realise that steering your life from shared experiences was actually also important for academic or applied research. It is not about the individual genius, but about a team that tests and explores

ideas, about the process that is gradually adjusted, about the questions that are raised. It is therefore very important to always listen to those involved. 'Even if they have no formal education, they know their own reality very well and can often explain to you in detail how the system of exclusion, exploitation or corruption works.'

By immersing both his personal life and his academic work in the experiences and needs of India's poor majority, Drèze has truly become part of the national furniture. When I ask whether, as a relative outsider, he can sometimes build bridges between castes, religious communities or regional identities, Drèze interrupts me with an affirmative: 'I am not an outsider'. Followed





by a somewhat more doubtful: 'Of course I am never fully part of the poor majority. The mere fact that I speak English protects me from abuse of power and exclusion. It is true that I do not belong to any caste, but in practice my position is sometimes comparable to that of upper-caste people.'

The importance of rights

'What really unites people', says Drèze, 'is a shared experience of repression or marginalisation'. Does that statement leave room for what we usually call 'international solidarity'? Drèze doubts it. 'Solidarity is not a one-way street. And I still think it requires a fair degree of proximity.' What people from Belgium can do, according to Jean Drèze, is empathise: try to empathise with the worries, uncertainties and dreams of people on the other side of the planet. And commit yourself to it.

What ultimately counts, I gather from his curriculum, is not so much the compassion of those who are well off, but the rights acquired by the poor: the right to food security, the right to work, the right to information, the right

to education - although Drèze immediately adds that in India, there is more of a right to education facilities in the neighbourhood than a right to quality education for all. 'Are rights the crucial key to social development', I ask. Drèze hesitates. 'The crucial key to social development does not exist, I'm afraid. But in a country like India, where the poor are ignored, rights are of decisive importance. You can enforce rights. Look at the right to work in rural India: without a binding legislative framework, it would be unthinkable that for fifteen years more than fifty million families have been given work by the government.'

If there is one goal for which Jean Drèze would still like to dedicate himself in the coming years, it is for a Right to Health. The importance of this became absolutely clear during the covid crisis, he says. 'Health care in India is uneven, compartmentalised and far too privatised. The result, as in education, is unacceptably bad, especially for those who cannot afford private care.'

At the moment, he is very preoccupied with education, a theme that runs as one of the red

threads through his academic and active life. 'It is incomprehensible how little concern there is about the closure of schools by COVID-19. You can only explain that because privileged children continue to enjoy safe distance education, and it is the voices of that class that dominate the media. Meanwhile, online education is unthinkable for poor children and they are thus left empty-handed.' Incidentally, Drèze, like other researchers, has previously noted that even in normal times, education is neglected: the chance of a rural school being devoid of teaching activity is about 50 per cent every day. 'India rather invests in infrastructure than in its human talent.'

Shared interest versus community politics

Jean Drèze believes that a campaign for the right to health is within the realm of possibility. 'There are quite a few groups and movements working for better and accessible healthcare. But what we need is a united front, across all divisions.'

Is a broad and united front still possible, I ask,

now that the Hindu nationalists have been in power for seven years and the broader Hindutva movement is increasingly polarising along cultural-religious fault lines. 'The Modi regime is certainly putting a dent in the belief that we can change the world for the better. I am still hopeful, but with less confidence. Between 2001 and 2014, we saw a step-by-step construction of what could have become a system of social protection. Today we are on the defensive,' Drèze sighs. The budget for midday meals at school was almost halved in 2015 and cut again in 2021. 'We now have to spend much of our time and energy defending what was already acquired, rather than being able to build on it.'

It is not that the Hindu nationalist government does nothing for the poor, Drèze adds. 'It provided subsidies for housing, for gas and for building toilets. Useful, certainly. But more aimed at winning the next elections than at building real social protection in the longer term.'

A different approach to politics, which suits him much better, he finds in Dr Ambedkar - champion of the Dalits and chief author of the

Indian Constitution. This quote from 1949, with which he ends *Sense and Solidarity*, is dear to Drèze: 'Without equality, liberty would produce the supremacy of the few over the many. Equality without liberty would kill individual initiative. Without fraternity, liberty and equality would not become a natural course of things.' He got to know Ambedkar's work and thinking late, he says. 'Until I moved to Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh, in 2002, I had hardly heard of him. But when I found his *Annihilation of Caste* in the library, I was overwhelmed.'

Two-and-a-half letters of love

Now that the construction of a free, just and equal society is no longer just a fight against structural inequality and division, but also a struggle for the cultural imagination of citizens and society, I wanted to know whether Jean Drèze ever turns to poetry, in good times or bad. He laughs. Poetry is far removed from economics, of course. But his decade in Allahabad - 'where everyone and their uncle is a poet of sorts' - did leave him with a few poems. Or, rather, with a few doha's, a medieval verse form that is popular in Hindi and Urdu.

With much regret for the approximate translation, in which much depth, reference and rhythm gets lost, he shares a few. The first can be read as programmatic for a well-known economist who tries to stay out of the limelight: 'So what if you are great [tall]? Look at the [tall] palm tree, it gives no shade to the traveller and when it gives fruit, it is out of reach.' A second is more philosophical: 'Asking for a long life, I got four days. Two were spent in desire and two in waiting.' Perhaps, Drèze adds, 'you can also translate the second part as: two days were spent in making dreams, and two in waiting for them to happen.' The activist in him would rather not dream or wait, but campaign and change the system. And the third doha is almost mystic: 'The whole world is reading scriptures, but no-one has become learned. The one who understands two-and-a-half letters of love, attains wisdom.'



जान टें... नहीं !



नेत...

विरोध एवं संकल्प

22-23 मार्च

फायरिंग रेंज विरोधी केन्द्रीय जन स...









Biography

BORN In Belgium in 1959, has lived in India since 1979, and became an Indian citizen in 2002.

STUDIED Mathematical Economics at the University of Essex; PhD (Economics) at the Indian Statistical Institute, New Delhi.

WORK Taught at London School of Economics and Delhi School of Economics. Now Visiting Professor at the Department of Economics, Ranchi University and also member of the Economic Advisory Council to Chief Minister of Tamilnadu headed by Nobel Laureate Esther Duflo. He has made wide-ranging contributions to development economics and public economics, with special reference to India.

RESEARCH Is known for his influential work on hunger, poverty, education, social security and gender inequality. The combination of extensive field work and qualitative analysis of everyday life and poverty, along with quantitative work makes his work distinctive in the field

of economics. He uniquely brings to the table his extensive fieldwork combined with outstanding analytical skills. Is co-author (with Amartya Sen) of, among other books, Hunger and Public Action (1989) and An Uncertain Glory: India and its Contradictions (2013). He is one of the co-authors of the Public Report on Basic Education in India (1999). One of



his latest books is Sense And Solidarity - Jholawala Economics for Everyone (2017). Other co-authors include Nicholas Stern, with whom he has written on policy reform when market prices are distorted, and Nobel laureate in economics Angus Deaton.

ACTIVIST Against forced evictions and for homeless' rights. He wrote a short book under the pen name of Jean Delarue about this movement and the life of the homeless in London, called No. 1 Clapham Road: the diary of a squat. He is also an active member of the Right to Food Campaign and the National Campaign for the People's Right to Information in India, and the worldwide movement for peace and disarmament. He became widely known as one of the architects of India's 2005 National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. This act entitles any rural family that cannot find work or an income to 100 days of employment in a public project. In the coming years, Jean Drèze would like to dedicate his time for a Right to Health.

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SUPPORTED PROJECT BY JEAN DRÈZE

“I have had a long if intermittent association with Mobile Creches (MC), right from my early days in Delhi in 1979 when I used to go to the MC office once in a while to help stuff postcards in envelopes addressed to potential donors. MC has played a leading role in the creation of worksite creches for children of construction workers, and beyond that, in the campaign for early childhood development as a right of all Indian children. We have also been comrades in the right to food campaign. MC’s work is an abiding source of inspiration.”



MOBILE CRECHES: NURTURING CHILDHOOD SOWING CHANGE

Mobile Creches (MC) is a pioneering organisation working for the right of marginalised children to Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD). Its work spans from grassroot level interventions to policy advocacy at the national level in India.

MC was an idea born out of compassion for children, indignation at their plight and the determination to make change. The first ‘mobile creche’ was set up in 1969, at a construction site near Rajghat, in Delhi. It was a safe, nurturing shelter for the children of construction workers, open six days a week, eight hours a day, on the site near the hutments, where the little ones could play, learn, eat, sleep - and be cared for. And the idea spread: from building sites to urban slums; from childcare services to training and advocacy. The idea started a movement in ECCD, for some of the most neglected children, in the harshest of circumstances.





The programme has four main components:

- (1) Ensuring childcare, pre-school education, nutrition and health to 15,000+ children/year, at construction sites in partnership with builders and in the slums through community crèches and family based interventions;
- (2) Building awareness on child issues and linking families to state services;
- (3) Training community women and workers in other NGOs across India to run crèches;
- (4) Advocating with the government for the right policies, laws and programmes to impact young children across India.

The problem

There are 20 million children under 6 years, living in poverty, in urban India - at construction sites, on the streets, in the slums. Their parents work for a daily wage, without any benefits from employers or social security from the state or any access to childcare, healthcare and schools. The children, in their most foundational years, suffer neglect, abuse and deprivation from the essentials of developmental care.

India's infant mortality rate is 47 per 1000 live births-translating to 1.8 million deaths a year, of children under 1 year. Malnutrition affects 1 out of every 2 children under the age of three. India's malnutrition rates are among the highest in the world. Diarrhea, usually caused by unsafe drinking water or poor sanitation, is the second leading cause of deaths-accounting for one fifth of child deaths - among India's children. Out of school children constitute 1 of 4 boys and 1 of 3 girls.



The solution

MC initiated an intervention in the lives of children at a time when there was no buzz around Child Rights or malnutrition and little understanding of the overlapping concerns of children, women and workers. MC developed a model for childcare, for young children of marginalised communities, in the form of day care centres at a place of work, a construction site, in a settlement, or in an urban slum.

The provision of Day Care Creches is essential for the care and development of children. For working mothers, this project ensures proper childcare, education, nutrition and health services for vulnerable children, from 9 am to 5 pm, six days a week, while they can pursue regular work.

Impact

MC started as an idea and now their programmes have impacted close to a million lives:

- 867,000 children
- 6,500 women trained as childcare workers
- 1,000 daycare centres
- 250 builder partners
- 100 network partners



Advocacy

Policy

MC led from the front in providing inputs in young children's holistic development, to the formulation of the National ECCD Policy, 2013, and National Education Policy 2020.

Laws

MC strengthened the voices from the informal sector to bring about the Building and Other Construction Workers Act, 1996, with a clear provision for crèches.

National/local networks

MC co-founded the Forum for Creche and Childcare Services (FORCES), a national network, along with other organisations in 1989. After the early, strong leadership at the national level, MC has been Convenor of the Delhi chapter of FORCES.

MC also incubated the Alliance for Right to ECD, an informal network of partners leading on ECD thought leadership recommendations. MC hosts the Secretariat.

Collaborated with like-minded organisations to initiate the National Consortium for Crèches at Construction Sites (NC3S) to accelerate quality childcare services at worksites.



www.mobilecreches.org





FOUNDATION P&V

*emancipation participation
citizenship solidarity*

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