

# Give the poor economic opportunities: Expert

**Naomi Canton**  
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THE DEPICTION of poverty in the film *Slumdog Millionaire* could help address problems of those trapped in hand-to-mouth existences in India, a leading poverty reduction expert claimed.

Speaking at the American Center on Monday Dr Deepa Narayan, former senior advisor to the World Bank on poverty reduction, said although worldwide interest in slums, depicted in the Oscar-winning film, had made middle-class Indians "very uncomfortable".

"The interest was important to address issues of poverty in

urban and rural areas of India, especially among the youth, thousands of whom are looking for a job," she said.

Narayan has just completed a five-year study of 60,000 poor people in 15 countries titled 'Moving Out of Poverty'.

The secret to lifting people out of hardship was to create economic opportunities for them, allow them access to free markets and not give government handouts, she said.

"Poor people are not stupid. They have high aspirations. Seventy-seven per cent of people we interviewed said they expected to be better off in the future. Ninety per cent expected their children to be better

**“ Poor people are not stupid; they are not lazy or drunk. They take lots of initiatives and have high aspirations. Seventy-seven per cent said they expected to be better off in the future. ”**

**—DR DEEPA NARAYAN,**  
former senior advisor to World Bank  
on poverty reduction

off. Psychology is not the problem, it is the lack of economic opportunities."

She added when poor people took initiatives but remained poor, it was because of lack of financial capital.

And when they had access to markets, but remained destitute, it was because they were paid wrongly for their goods.

She said giving them professional inputs on what the markets wanted, getting them to work in groups to get higher returns, giving them access to large loans and infrastructure were the solutions.

One of the most surprising findings was that those people living in conflict zones, such as Assam, could lift themselves out of poverty quicker than people in peaceful areas as more governmental and NGO money flowed in to build infrastructure and homes.