Synthesis of the contributions to the Consultation for the choice of the Theme of October 17, 2021

A. Introduction :

A1. A few statistics :

- Following the Consultation on the choice of the Theme for the year 2021, the Forum on overcoming extreme poverty received 84 responses\(^1\), either from individuals or from groups/associations, which correspond to 125 contributions. Behind these 125 contributions there are even more than 125 people… these responses represent contributions from 40 countries.

- The proposed Themes, as a reminder, are:
  - Theme 1: Building Back Better by Breaking the Cycle of Intergenerational Poverty.
  - Theme 2: Building Together a World Respectful of People and Planet by Ending Persistent Poverty.

- In terms of theme choice, Theme #1 won 59 votes and Theme 2 won 66 votes.

Many persons found both themes to be important.

Some of the responses also suggested keeping these themes for future years.

A2. Importance of the words used :

The detailed analysis of the various responses highlighted the importance of each term used in the wording of the themes: it is important to use clear words, which do not leave room for any interpretation that could change the general meaning. The wording is sometimes too complicated, too long and inaccessible for people who do not have sufficient command of the language.

Nicolas, ATD Belgium: «I find the two themes presented too complicated. It makes them inaccessible to people who have difficulty with this level of language.»

Thus have been identified several terms that will have to be modified:

« intergenerational »: there is an enthusiastic consensus to highlight the persistence of poverty from generation to generation and the transmission of values and efforts that have been developed within the same family, from generation to generation, to fight poverty. Nevertheless, the use of the term “intergenerational” is strongly contested.

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\(^1\) Say 43 Forum correspondents, 28 ATD teams and 13 members of the International Committee October 17
➢ « building back » : it would be better to speak of new construction/ construction different, because an identical reconstruction is not desired, given the too strong inequalities present in the current world ..

➢ « break the cycle » : the verb to break implies too much violence. We should not think that breaking the cycle means breaking the links between generations.

ATD Tanzania : […] « intergenerational poverty » might be misunderstood and interpreted as if the circle of poverty was determined, there are no chances for a better life and it puts the responsibility and a sort of fault on the parents towards their children. “Persistent poverty” is a wider term that can be more explored with families living in poverty, and does not mean that the situation of poverty in which the family finds itself is automatically transmitted from one generation to the next.».

Carolina, Guatemala : « we cannot speak of REBUILDING a world that has been destroyed, but of REIMAGINING and then BUILDING it. »

Annette, Germany : « I do not like the violent language "break". I fear the misunderstanding of breaking intergenerational ties in order to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty. »

A3. Starting a reflection from the search for the Hidden Dimensions of Poverty

Beatriz, Mexico : « I see that thinking could be broadened from the Hidden Dimensions of Poverty to thinking about the aggravating factor of persistence and duration. »

Collectif 17 Octobre, France : « Long-term responses involve large societal choices, cannot be decided without the expertise of all citizens and, in particular, of the most precarious. The dispossession of the power to act of people in poverty is one of the dimensions of poverty. »

A4. Importance of the Day of October 17 and its fundamentals: poverty is violence, poverty is not fatal, the refusal of abandonment…

Reminder of Father Joseph Wresinski’s message:

« Wherever men and women are condemned to live in extreme poverty, Human Rights are violated. To come together to ensure that these rights be respected is our solemn duty. »

Henri, DRC : « The people think it’s normal for people to live in extreme poverty. […] Thanks to the day of October 17, a day to pay tribute to those who are campaigning for the fight against poverty, it is an opportunity for us to make the world understand that poverty is the work of man and that only men can suppress it, to understand that poverty is not inevitable and that it can be eradicated. »

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B. Theme 1 : Building Back Better by Breaking the Cycle of Intergenerational Poverty

B1. A topical issue:
COVID-19 affects everyone around the world (it’s a pandemic), regardless of country, gender, age, skin colour... It amplifies existing inequalities (difficulties in complying with barrier measures, difficulty in maintaining access to education...) and aggravates the situation of the most vulnerable.

Michael, Switzerland : « The theme is very much present in what some families are currently experiencing – even stronger because of the coronavirus measures. Parents who no longer have the right to see their children in the home, children who have difficulty attending school because of a lack of equal opportunities, etc...[...]. »

Seepat, Burkina Faso : « This COVID-19 health crisis has highlighted existing inequalities around the world and must lead us to change the way we are and live. »

Grace, DRC : « [...] after COVID-19, people living below the poverty threshold has increased because the youth/children are not studying, the people dont leave for work, several persons have lost their jobs and several countries are in crisis.»

B2. Discrimination against Children, Youth, Women and the Poorest:
It is amplified by the pandemic; there is also a resurgence of racism, which sometimes results in systematic mistrust between the different actors (patients, health care workers, politicians). It is essential to increase the power of those discriminated against to avoid a «double sentence».

Collectif 17 Octobre France : « « Many of the decisions that affect them are made by others (e.g., institutions), often without people being associated. This dispossession of the power to act is not new but, generation after generation, it deepens inequalities. Michelle Bachelet, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, explains that “Those who have been left behind and powerless by multi-generational discrimination systematically have unequal access to services and opportunities – including education, housing, sanitation, access to employment and justice, and to participate in decisions that affect them. They are structurally disadvantaged in the face of any threat». 

Aminetou, Mauritania : « To break the circle of poverty, it is necessary to educate girls. Girls stop their education too early and then they become mothers. Sometimes it is difficult for them to manage financially their household, to know how to read, etc. Girls must be encouraged to go further in their studies. »

B3. Fundamental rights are even more violated in times of pandemic.
There were a number of responses that touched the education dimension. Some of these responses focussed on how the COVID-19 crisis forced the youth to abandon their studies and the digital poverty that many people experience. […]

Lucia, Bolivia : « . Last week I hurt my leg, but I couldn’t x-ray because I couldn’t afford the COVID-19 test. »

Christiane., Belgium : « […] with the pandemic, some (young people) have dropped out of school, with parents unable to help them.»
Fanuel, DRC: «During the pandemic crisis, hunger attacked several families, children were not going to school, and it was difficult for those families.»

B4. The important role of the family in lifting oneself out of poverty.

Intra-family solidarity and solidarity between members of the same community, as well as the transmission of the means to fight against poverty (energy, resistance, resilience, values...) makes it possible to better bear the consequences of poverty on a daily basis.

Richard, Burkina Faso: «There was a couple who had a child, the father went on a trip. He left his wife with the child. The child was in school. At school, the child was asked to pay his tuition. What the mother could not do: she asked her brother, same father, same mother, to give her money to pay the tuition so that the child could continue. His brother told him that was out of the question. That he had nothing. And so he could give her the money, all she had to do was send her motorcycle registration as a guarantee. A motorcycle that the husband had just paid for his wife. She turned left, right, there was no other way out. She gave her own brother the registration card for her motorcycle to take the money to pay for her child’s education. When her husband came, he paid the money back, and got his wife’s motorcycle registration. Today, the child is in the 7th year of medical studies.»

ATD Bulgaria: «So on a positive side, raising the question of inter-generational poverty is an opportunity to go into a deeper knowledge on how people experiencing poverty are struggling, and how their parents struggled against poverty and extreme poverty.»

B5. A real opportunity to change the world.

The occurrence of this COVID-19 pandemic represents a real opportunity to change the world, move forward and build it differently (not rebuild it).

Roberto, Uruguay: "Rebuilding" can be understood as "returning to what was before", which is not what people wish, more particularly people leaving in extreme poverty.»

ATD, Bulgaria: «What are the lessons we are learning from this pandemic to break the cycle of poverty? What are the lessons we can learn from the past to build a future that leaves no one behind?»

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C. Theme 2: Building Together a World Respectful of People and Planet by Ending Persistent Poverty.

C1. We must not forget the environment despite the pandemic.

There was a number of responses stressing the urgency of the climate situation and how it is worsening the situation of people in extreme poverty.

Maria, Mauritius: « I am afraid that focusing on COVID-19, we are forgetting about climate, environmental, political, economic and social issues »

Daniel, DRC: « The climate issue remains the most worrying and urgent, because it concerns us all without exception. It is sure that the COVID-19 pandemic is there; we are trying to get out of it but the climate issue remains troubling. »

ATD Canada: « We get our brain "covid"ed. By talking about the disease, I’m tired of it (exasperated). I want to get away from the first theme. »

Max, Guatemala: « In countries like Guatemala, and it is not the only one in the world, climate change is worsening the situation of people in extreme poverty. And even middle-class people are falling into poverty. »

C2. The poor families are forced to live in unsafe and unhealthy environments.

Poor people are also victims of environmental destruction, often forgotten by the state and at risk of being further left behind. Some responses also highlighted how the poor people are excluded from a sustainable lifestyle and risk being blamed for unsustainable lives.

Mati, Bangladesh: « During our research program “The hidden dimensions of poverty” and our work experience in Bangladesh we have observed directly how climate change and environmental degradation can lead people towards worst level of poverty and make them hopeless. That’s why our team think that we should highlight this issue more. Which may help to get more attention towards is sensitive and important issue for countries like Bangladesh. »

Jean et Bernard, France: « The means must be put in place to ensure that people keep their land, their culture. The money we put into fighting climate change must go to the most disadvantaged, otherwise this crisis will remain an accelerator of inequalities and social injustices. For example, it is not the most disadvantaged who can access the premium to buy an electric car. And at the end of the day, the poorest will still be called polluters. »

C3. The issue of persistent poverty in Theme 1 appears to be included in Theme 2 which addresses environmental and social issues.

Justin, DRC: « On the occasion of October 17, 2020, Madame Marie said: «In the village, my parents brought me up through farming. This activity allows me to feed and educate my children. So I inherited all the techniques from my parents. Last season, I harvested nothing on our land flooded by the Congo River. That's why I came to sow maize and squash on this land of our NGO. I hope that our crops will be abundant and of very good quality. Like Madame Marie, there are still many families and individuals in the Democratic Republic of Congo and in other countries of the world... »
who inherit the precarious activities of their parents, grandparents, great grandparents. From generation to generation, these families and individuals struggle to change their lives, but as long as our societies do not create the conditions for these families and individuals to get by, their precarious situation remains the same or deteriorates further at the slightest environmental or social catastrophe.

C4. Continuation of Theme 2 (2021) with the 2020 Theme:

Theme 1 could then be proposed for the two years 2022/2023, as part of a conservation process of the same theme over two (2) years rather than one (1). In fact, there doesn’t seem to be enough time to work on this broad theme in 2020 due to the COVID-19 crisis.

Jean, Rwanda - « […] this theme will allow us, in our organisations, to deepen the human ecology that we have undertaken by incorporating the ideas that interest human societies in their links with their environments of life. »

Coraline, Belgium : « I like very much the fact of insisting on the respect of People and the respect of the Climate. These are notions that in my opinion need to be said and said again, because it is not necessarily self-evident to talk about both sides. »

Group from Algeria : «. It is important to mobilise so that the voices of people living in poverty who also face the consequences of climate and environmental change are heard and their experiences and efforts are recognised. »

C5. Work on both climate change, environment and also violence to avoid impact on future generations.

These three actions are inseparably linked and will reduce the impact of poverty on future generations.

Jean et Bernard, France : « The warmer the planet, the more people will flee their land, their country. All these people will be left with nothing. If we do not pay attention to that, we will have hundreds of people dying of hunger, of thirst, so it affects humanity, human dignity. And when we say flight from our lands, from our places, we also say violence between men. We must develop solutions of solidarity, of acceptance… ». 

C6. Human solidarity linked to environmental protection will contribute to poverty eradication.

Chrismaine, Haïti : « Since we have the earth as a universal (common) patrimony to be safeguarded, we are creating a kind of common solidarity for the protection of people and the planet, which will automatically lead to the eradication of poverty. The theme appeals to a kind of peace of mind among all the roommates of planet earth (humans) so by ending the persistence of poverty, the earth will turn more just. »

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2 The 2020 Theme was : « Acting together to achieve social and environmental justice for all »
C7. Fundamental rights for all must remain at the heart of reflection.

Some respondents highlighted the discrimination against specific groups of people (indigenous and itinerants). Immigrants are seen as outcasts. The death and insults by hospital staff of a first nation woman in Canada in Atikamek highlights the systemic discrimination against certain groups of people. Discrimination against the poor is also systemic and all forms of discrimination must end. There must be equality and equal treatment of people.

**ATD Canada**: « This reminds me of the injustice of the unjustly arrested person and the Atikamek who died alone and insulted. We must all be put on the same footing, aboriginal people, all cultures and the planet. Put an end to this. A woman who cannot work because she is too fat or a person who cannot rent an apartment because of the number of her children. These injustices need to be addressed. We all live in low-income housing because we are poor. We must not discriminate between ourselves. We do not know each other’s despair.»

**Ruffin, DRC**: « We cannot say that we are fighting poverty without there being equitable justice and without a planet that allows everyone to live a good life on it. »

**Julia, Peru**: « [...] in my community we don't have basic rights, we don't have access to a healthy environment. Sometimes, we have the feeling that the State forgets us.»

C8. Education as a way out of poverty.

The importance of access to education, not only at primary and secondary levels but also to higher or vocational education was emphasised as a way out of persistent poverty. Focus on the education of the girl child was highlighted. Girls end their education too early and that they need to be encouraged to go as far and as high as possible with their education.

**Marcela, Bolivia**: « The most important thing would be to educate all of us to conserve and make our environment cleaner, healthier and in our favor. Education also allows us to achieve social justice, to overcome discrimination and to learn to put ourselves in the place of others and to respect ourselves, to respect human rights. I know it's long term, but if we improve our environment, our education and end discrimination, there would be a big change for everyone and relationships and jobs would improve, we would all help each other and it would be different. »

**Josephine, Nigeria**: « In my country, poverty could be eradicated through education, through empowerment, through better environment, etc... »

C9. This theme is unifying because it is at the heart of the struggle of many other organizations in particular ecological: it is a theme of action.

**Natasha, Switzerland**: « Theme 2 can broaden to new perspectives, reach new people or allow us to collaborate with environmental activist associations with which we currently have few contacts. This theme could reach more people. »

**Aminetou, Mauritania**: « We are working on food, on the planting of vegetables, food diversification. »
C10. People living in poverty are primary agents of change.

People living in poverty should be given a place in the decision making processes and that the fight against environmental destruction is not only responsibility and expertise of ecologists but one that applies to all.

**Christian, Burundi:** «Beyond breaking this shame, families have the courage, commitment and determination to come out of the silence to say NO to poverty. therefore, not to give them a place in decision-making at national, regional and international level on issues such as poverty where climate change is a disrespect for human dignity».

**ATD Bolivia:** «We can also replant in the neighbourhood, depending on the type of plants there, the engineers can guide us. We can plant things that are natural and not artificial. We can advertise on the radio, we can train. »

**Lourdes, Bolivia:** «Promote justice that defends integral and cultural ecology. Also to save the wisdom of our people who work in the fields. They have so much knowledge. »

**Maria, Mauritius:** «Young people have their say on the issue of the environment and protection of the planet. Because the destruction of the planet affects them directly.»

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