

LETTER TO FRIENDS AROUND THE WORLD

Permanent Forum on Extreme Poverty in the World



International Movement ATD Fourth World
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Ending Extreme Poverty: A Utopian Vision?

For centuries, extreme poverty has been haunting our sense of humanity. For centuries, children, men and women have been devastated by hunger, trapped in ignorance, locked into a cycle of dependency and humiliation.

The world panicked as economic recession—and its dramatic consequences—reared its ugly head. Yet shouldn't it have started panicking long ago? And how can we not worry that once the most serious aspects of the financial and economic crisis are resolved, the challenge of ending extreme poverty will once again be put out of sight and out of mind?

In this world that revolves around money, new principles must be adopted to prevent hundreds of millions of people from falling into poverty, and to lift out of permanent crisis the “bottom billion”—to use the words of the United Nations Secretary-General—the billion who do not know what they will eat tomorrow, if they will be able to keep a roof over their heads, or if they will be able to give a future to their children.

People experiencing the worst destitution prove here, through their stories, that liberty and solidarity, right and responsibility, are inseparable values. They call on us to search together for what defines human beings and their

future, and for ways to fully take others into consideration—including their history and worldview, their uniqueness and universality.

Thanks to the association Mati in Bangladesh, one mother was able to reveal a deeply-rooted aspiration: *“I am poor but it makes me proud that even I can contribute something.”* In Turkey, by creating the Lepers Hospital and the Association Against Leprosy, one doctor has refused to accept that her patients suffering from leprosy be shut away, isolated from the other patients. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, an association of farmers and breeders has adopted the mission *“to help others understand that the distribution of food supplies and other provisions is not going to help us develop.”* In Ethiopia, the start-up of a library by the association “Let me be a child” offers children experiencing extreme poverty *“a wonderful opportunity, because they can now learn for free.”*

“What I would like, one day, is to live to see, enraptured, through my child's eyes, an end to poverty.” writes a young student in Portugal. So, is ending extreme poverty a utopian vision? No, it is determination on the move.

Huguette Redegeld



• The joy of having a library

The Ethiopian-German association “Let me be a child” was started in 2004. Its objectives are to alleviate the economic, psychosocial and educational problems of disadvantaged children, most of whom are orphans or are coming from very poor families. The association started with taking care of 15 children. Soon this number had increased and with the financial help of individuals in Germany, the association bought a house called ‘The Island’, a day care centre where 45 children are being supported at the moment. In order not to lose contact with their families or communities, the children live with relatives or kind friends of their families. In various ways, the association supports children in their education. Here they tell us about their library.

In 2007, we had the idea of starting a library in our association “Let me be a child” in Addis Abeba. We bought

some school books to help support the children in their schooling. Many people were kind enough to donate us their own books.

In 2008, Nasrin S. started working with us. Nasrin is a German author of kids' books and she comes in once a week to read different TAPORI⁽¹⁾ stories with our children. She always makes photocopies so each of them can have their own individual copy. These books gave our children the idea to write their own Tapori story which is called 'Tariku'.

Nasrin told us about a street-library she had worked with in Madagascar and we got the idea to do something similar. Slowly the idea grew to starting up a small library.

(1) www.tapori.org

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With a supporting contribution from "Help for Africa", a German NGO, we bought a shelf and other necessary materials. Our shelf was quickly filled up with donated books.

Whilst we were in the process of building up our library, two members of our staff, two children and Nasrin, visited the Goethe Institute, where we were given advice in how to prepare the books, so that the children would be able to start borrowing them.

We are very pleased that we now have a library! Hanna and Teresa are running the library. This is a wonderful opportunity for our children because they can now learn for free and get help and support if they need it. We are happy that they now have the possibility to borrow books and read stories whenever they want. They really love books! It's great to know that we have so many friends around the world who help us so that we can help the children. Thank you for being our friend!

HANNA AND TERESA, "LET ME BE A CHILD", ETHIOPIA

● It makes me proud that even I can contribute

Mati is a small NGO based in the north of Bangladesh working with the most excluded in Bangladeshi society. Working in close partnership, Mati aims to develop projects which will meet their needs and transform their lives. Mati wants their work to be a visible statement so they are together alongside the poorest, to share the many burdens that they carry. They also share in their joy and jubilation that is so deeply embedded into the Bengali soul, regardless of the circumstances.

Here they tell us about their 17th of October.

On the way home from having celebrated our 17th of October, a group of young boys who are living in a slum told us: "That was the nicest day that we have had in a long time," and they happily chatted away with us until it was time to go our separate ways. It felt so good to hear that

and it made me feel happy. It was a sign that our goal to bring rich and poor together had been successful.

As the 17th of October falls on the same day as one of our biggest "Hindu Pujas" festivals in Bangladesh, we had to change our program to the 19th; otherwise we wouldn't have received any attention. We had already marked the 17th for the first time last year with a small number of active volunteers. This year, all of Mati's 23 members of staff helped to prepare the event. Our aim was to build a program that would involve both the rich and poor, so that no one would feel left out. We decided to offer a free lunch and, for those who could afford it, they could contribute towards the costs.

Our staff spent the whole day collecting the ingredients needed to cook the meals. These were given as donations from local shop owners and households. A woman living in poverty gave us some potatoes and said: "I am poor, but it makes me proud that even I can contribute something." In the end, because we had been given so many things, we decided to use what was left over for a lottery. We also

set up a drawing corner for the kids and a local artist painted a huge beautiful banner with a 'wishing tree'.

We cut fruits, candles, birds and hearts out of card, so people could write down their wishes and then attach them onto the tree. Most of the kids simply wanted to have their names written on the cards and then pinned them onto their t-shirts. The lottery turned out to be a big success. Tickets were bought for the modest sum of 5 Tk and soon rickshaw pullers and local women were dancing with joy as they won packets of lentils and rice. These prizes were worth a lot more than the tickets themselves.



To get people thinking we made a banner where we borrowed the slogan from Bangladesh's national anthem, "Amar shunor Bangladesh..." - "My golden Bangladesh..." We added the photos of rich and poor Bengali's holding the national passport with this sentence underneath: "If Bangladesh is to be golden for everyone, then we have to share." During the feedback session

with our members of staff, it was very clear that what they had enjoyed the most was seeing the joy they had inspired in other people. They also felt very proud that they had been able to create such a beautiful event solely with the donations of local people.

ANDREA R., MATI,
BANGLADESH

● **Change should come from the community itself**

In the province of South Kivu, the town of Uvira is built on the shore of Lake Tanganyika. For several years, the people have suffered greatly because of the war and the actions of various armed groups. Several adults, driven by the same concern, formed the Uvira Group of Farmers and Breeders (GGEU). They grow rice, wheat, sweet potatoes, manioc, onions and vegetables, as well as breeding pigs, goats and chickens and keeping bees.

One of the members explained: "Beforehand, I didn't know how to talk to other people. I learnt to do this thanks to this group, to work together to fight against poverty and to live in solidarity with our neighbours."

The members of the group were concerned at the state of a lot of the children. After corresponding with Tapori (the children's branch of ATD Fourth World) with which they were all involved, they started to bring the children together three times a month. Another member explained: "We played games with them which showed, for example, that hanging around doing nothing or begging weren't good ways to spend their lives. Some children changed how they behaved. It's also important to help children develop their imagination. I taught them to make cars out of wire, as well as little statues and houses. That could help them in the future."

At the same time, a female member of the group stressed, "The children often help us. For example, when there are bereavements here, people make contributions to support



the family who is struggling; often it's the children who remind their parents to contribute. The children don't just learn from us, we also learn from them. "

Receiving publications like the 'Tapori Newsletter' or the 'Letter to Friends around the World' is very important for the group members. "It encourages us and helps us learn about other countries." They added, "We would also like ourselves to be known around the world."

The activities of the GCEU – growing crops, breeding animals and working alongside Tapori children – have led the group to think about development. "Here we tend to think about international organisations in terms of money and the aid that they bring. Many non-governmental organisations do not take a bottom-up approach, working from the reality and point of view of communities; rather their approach is top down and destabilises communities rather than uniting them. We have a big responsibility to understand and help others understand that the distribution of food supplies and other provisions – which become like money here – is not going to help us develop but instead keeps us down-trodden. Change should come from the community itself and not from the outside."

*UVIRA GROUP OF FARMERS AND BREEDERS (GCEU),
DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO*

● **A lifelong support to people affected by leprosy**

Thanks to the commitment and perseverance of Professor Dr. Türkan Saylan, it was possible to treat people suffering from leprosy in a specific hospital, the Lepers' Hospital, which opened in Istanbul in 1976. Dr. Saylan was the Director of this hospital for 24 years, until she retired, and was President of the Association Against Leprosy that she founded in the same year. She passed away in 2009.

For a long time, patients suffering from leprosy were locked up in a psychiatric hospital, separate from other patients. To improve this situation and give these patients specific treatment, the Lepers' Hospital was founded on land situated within the psychiatric hospital's grounds.

The Health Ministry and the University of Istanbul paid for the costs of medical treatment specific to this illness (salaries of physicians and nurses, operations, medication, etc.). For this reason Dr. Saylan also created the Association Against Leprosy (Cüzzamlı Savaş Derneği) to cover all expenditures relating to the ancillary staff (cleaning and kitchen staff, etc.) In particular this association covers expenditures for a social support programme which is just as important as the medical treatment itself. Patients are cared for until they pass away, and the association also takes care of their families. This life-long support for patients is unique in countries stricken by leprosy.

The social support programme is funded solely by donations, which unfortunately are dwindling. The programme consists of:

- literacy support for patients during their time in hospital;
- financing of travel to obtain treatment;
- financing of many projects to facilitate integration of patients in their villages, by providing them with the means to make a living (learning a trade, allocation of cows or sheep, small business, newspaper stand, etc.). It is extremely important to enable patients to be financially independent, so that they can regain respect and social consideration within their community.
- school attendance for their children thanks to grants (72 children for the school year 2010-2011);
- payment of social insurance premiums for elderly patients until their death;
- payment of certain social security contributions as necessary so that they can benefit from a full retirement pension;
- minimum financial aid for elderly patients without revenue, living permanently in various hospital centres.

In December 2009, not long after Prof. Saylan's death, the hospital was closed down. The only service that remains which bears the name of Professor Saylan is dedicated to researching leprosy and is in the old hospital. However the Association Against Leprosy continues to function and pursues its agenda despite the difficulties.

EMMANUELLE R., TURKEY

• We had to leave school because of our problems. We wandered around for years, not knowing what to do. Now our aim is to succeed. We want to lift our heads, because our families are still in need. Some of them have to sort refuse; others have to search for water or for food. Previously many of us were ashamed, but today we are not afraid to talk to people and say what we think. We have learnt to study. Two years ago, none of us had touched a computer; some had never even seen one. We were eager to be like all young people. We want to succeed. People in society demoralise us, they don't believe in us, and they say that poor and dirty people do not deserve to learn how to use a computer. We are happy to prove them wrong. Our lives now have a future.

Testimony from a group of 40 young people undergoing computer training in the "Working and Learning Together" project, in Madagascar.

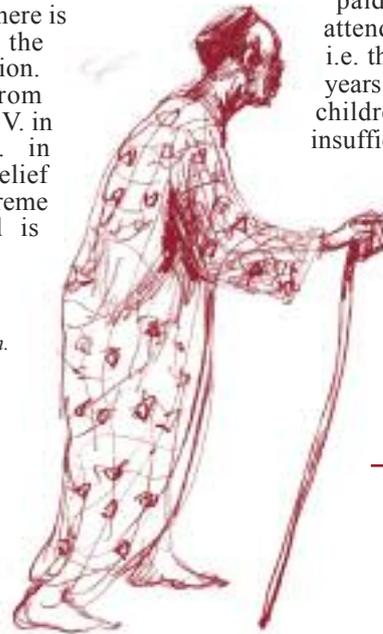
• I read the Letter to Friends with great interest. I found it full of brave initiatives and it taught me a lot. It is very important to know what other people are doing and thinking about a subject of universal importance. I agreed with most of the ideas expressed, and that makes me even keener to work more closely with them. In Cameroon, the problem of basic training for people is a serious one. Young people need training and education to found responsible families. There is great poverty amongst the under-educated population. The contributions from Gisèle Antunes R., Yuri V. in Peru and Rachel L. in Zambia reinforce my belief that the problem of extreme poverty in the world is above all a problem to do with emancipation of individuals.

Léonard B., Cameroon.

• With the aim of eliminating poverty among the most underprivileged people, we have helped a family where the father has an injured leg, preventing him from building a house and sending his children to school. He walks using a walking stick he made himself. He finds it very difficult to walk for long distances. The members of our Association built two daubed brick houses for him,

with straw roofs. We have paid for his two sons to attend post-primary school, i.e. the school fees for three years. The little food the two children were receiving was insufficient. The agency responsible was not taking account of the planned lessons. So again we took action to ensure they had enough to eat.

Mahmud Ali K., President, Fomap Nyarugusu Refugees Camp, Tanzania



Yes, I have already seen...

Yes, I have already seen
A beggar in tattered clothes
Carefully patched
With well-worn bits of cloth...

Yes, I have already seen
The eyes of a child veiled with sadness,
Though very young,
Forced to work in order to eat...

Yes, I have already seen
People abandoned by even their own,
Their only desire, a bit of warmth:
A smile or a cover against the cold...

Yes, I have already seen
A child begging in the street
Gratefully accepting
Whatever he was offered...

Yes, I have already seen
A hospital where nothing was right:
People stretched out like human wrecks
Waiting for someone to care...

Yes, I have already seen
A great deal of poverty,
Many tears, and no one to dry them,
In the neglected neighbourhood which I call home...

But... what I would like, one day,
Is to live to see,
Enraptured, through my child's eyes,
An end to poverty,
And a new hope rising up from our sad streets
To shine like a star, lighting the world.

*Ana Rita de Sousa Coelho,
6th grade student, Agrela High School, Portugal*

You too can share your observations and experiences through the website: www.atd-fourthworld.org/-Permanent-Forum-on-Extreme-Poverty or by email to permanent.forum@atd-fourthworld.org

The "Permanent Forum on Extreme Poverty in the World" is a network of committed people who want to develop friendship and exchange knowledge about what poor and very poor people teach us, i.e. people who suffer from multiple disadvantages in the areas of education, housing, employment, health and culture; those who are criticised and rejected the most. This forum invites people to join a worldwide movement to overcome extreme poverty, to rebuild communities with people living in extreme poverty, inspired by their lives. This movement expresses itself in the **Letter to Friends Around the World**, which publishes the texts written by its correspondents three times a year, in French, English, Spanish and Portuguese. The Permanent Forum is run by the International Movement ATD Fourth World, an international NGO whose headquarters are in Pierrelaye, France. Those who join the Forum do so in their own right, and do not have to become members of ATD Fourth World.

Our e-mail address is: permanent.forum@atd-fourthworld.org Internet : www.atd-fourthworld.org Subscription \$8/8€ per annum - Support subscription: \$10/10€ per annum.

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**HÉLÈNE PERDEREAU'S
COMMITMENT IS TO
ILLUSTRATE THE TEXTS
OF THE LETTER
ON A FREE-TIME BASIS**

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