In 2022 we will celebrate the 30th anniversary of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, recognised by the United Nations in 1992. This day is an opportunity to strengthen the voice of those in extreme poverty, their experiences, their aspirations, their struggles and the alliances needed to eradicate poverty and build peace. A peace that starts with the absence of war but isn’t fully built until the dignity of everyone is recognized. Meaningful peace efforts wherever there are or have been armed conflicts, and there is or has been inhumanity because of poverty.

Ten years ago, in 2012 after several years of participatory research, people experiencing poverty along with those working alongside them, professionals and academics, took part in an international colloquium at UNESCO entitled “Extreme Poverty Is Violence – Breaking the Silence – Searching for Peace.” Together all stated that poverty is violence, and that to act with those who suffer from it by seeking equal dignity is to build peace.

During the last International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, we stated that our societies treat nature like those in extreme poverty. And that today, it is necessary to take into account everything that links social, economic and environmental justice to change the world so that we will overcome extreme poverty.

This Letter to Friends Around the World 107 has real-life stories of commitment rooted in the life of people who resist poverty and exclusion daily. For example, Marielle’s commitment in Haiti to support her parents and siblings through a farming project. Or the young academic and professional in Togo, who learns from the experience of a boy struggling with the educational system in his country. In Egypt, young people in school bring books to those not in the educational system. Or Aminetou in Mauritania, who refuses to give up when she hears others say, “I can’t do anything, I don’t know how to do it.” So she starts a family gardening project, educational activities for young girls, and spaces where people listen and speak so as “to give them back their ability to take action.”

We are building know-how and a conviction through these shared experiences of activism. Experiences that bring us together to unite our strength so that we leave no one behind. Because leaving no one behind means building a real future for generations to come.

The theme for October 17, 2022 and 2023 crystallises this dynamic. That started 35 years ago when in 1987, Joseph Wresinski asked us to unite in order to build a world without poverty.

Chantal Consolini-Thiébaud,
Deputy Director, International Movement ATD Fourth World

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In 2022 we will celebrate a double anniversary. That of the first celebration of the World Day for Overcoming Extreme Poverty on October 17, 1987 at the Trocadero in Paris. Along with the UN’s recognition of October 17 as the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. The theme for October 17 this year is: Dignity for all in practice: the commitments we make together for social justice, peace and the planet.

For 2023 we will have the same theme. A theme strengthened by what we will learn this year.

Many people and organisations working at the grass-roots from around the world gave us feedback during the consultation on what has been accomplished through October 17. On page 4 of this Letter to Friends Around the World, we highlight some of this feedback. The two inside pages of this letter have four real-life stories of people involved in the struggle to overcome extreme poverty in the world.

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Her combat is my inspiration

I am an ecological activist with GAFE. I am also an agricultural technician, and a student in Legal Sciences. I am currently the General Secretary of an association for disabled people called MCPHPH: Mouvement citoyen des personnes handicapées physiques du Sud d’Haïti (Citizen’s Movement for Physically Disabled People in the South of Haiti).

I am promoting the Haitian novel, Ravine L’Espérance (The Ravine of Hope). Written to pay homage to the courage of people whose life is not easy. This novel has been extremely successful in the symposiums organized for it. While travelling to promote Ravine L’Espérance I found myself faced with another terrible reality – poverty. And I must admit that one must be very brave not to feel hopeless.

There is a type of psychological poverty that disadvantaged people suffer from. There is a deep negativity felt by the Haitian people. There are things that remain unsaid. Realities that we try to erase. Poverty is truly a complex problem. Our intellectuals are absent in Haiti, our elites are absent, our leaders are absent. This means we must fight poverty through public awareness of it, with no foregone conclusions. See what we can do so that everyone can believe in themselves. It is a lack of self-confidence that makes it so that people are not able to eradicate poverty. We are in this together.

To conclude, please allow me to share an experience that means a lot to me. There are several disabled women in our association, but I’d like to tell you about one of the most vulnerable. Her name is Sima Marielle and her disability was due to a high fever when she was a child in her family of eleven children. Despite her physical impairment and intellectual deficiency, her family counts on her to survive. Last year she sacrificed many things to go to an agriculture school, where she earned her first diploma. This course lasted several months and now she is struggling to cultivate the tiny parcel of land where the house is located to nourish the other eleven members of her family. She always tells me, “Chrismaine, I have to keep on working to to feed my little brothers and sisters.” This young lady is a source of inspiration for me.

Chrismaine Sévère, Mouvement citoyen des personnes handicapées physiques du Sud d’Haïti, Haiti

Getting children to love books

In Bayadeya, Egypt children learn to read. But getting them to love reading is a bigger challenge than swimming the Nile. That is why we have put in place a project designed to show that reading is fun, using the ATD Fourth World Street Library model. If kids are reluctant to go looking for books, then we arrange for the books to go looking for them. Falling in love with reading comes from the heart. There has to be a connection between child and book, like the one that a mother creates when she reads a bedtime story to her child. It is that connection that we are trying to create when we bring books to where the children are.

Children feel at home in the streets they know. We tell three stories, using three different narrators, while showing the children the pages of the books we are reading. This is so that they can see the illustrations which accompany the text. We ask them to tell us what they think of the stories. Then we sing, put on a puppet show or other performance, and finish with a game. In this way we make educational activities fun. The concept has been adopted by a couple of primary schools. In one, the “big boys and girls” familiarise themselves with stories which they then read to little ones in their first year or two of school. In the other, older children read to groups of younger ones. Who sit on benches lining the playground to eat their snacks during morning break. The older child shows pictures from the book while reading.

We then had the idea of making books readily available at various points in Bayadeya, with volunteers running loan services for local children via book boxes fixed to the walls of their homes. So far 19 boxes have been installed.

Finally, from the beginning of June until the end of August we ran a campaign called Children’s Stories, bringing together children from a number of schools to set up a fully-fledged neighbourhood library. The dedication shown by young people, the quality of what they produce, the pleasure they take in it, and the convivial atmosphere which results are all things which encourage us to continue.

Books stimulate emotions. They help us to understand what it is to be human, to feel passion and desire. They give us an insight into human psychology. They enable us to experience the ups and downs of history, and to get to know creative thinkers and pioneers of science. And, casting a magic spell, they give us a taste of the wonders of nature.

Father Xavier Subtil, educator, Egypt
What I know comes from my collaboration with children and their families

I stopped my education before high school. But I can do what I do because I work at the grass roots level. What I know about poverty comes from “collaboration with children and their families over a number of years.”

In my country most girls leave education too early. Motherhood then follows. Many of these women are unable to read very well and can find it difficult to manage household accounts, etc. Education is the key to everything. I start by identifying young people who have been away from school the longest and encourage them to study. Whether or not they are still of school age. Because even if you don’t go to school, you still need to learn how to support yourself in the future.

I also encourage mothers to learn a trade, promoting the establishment of small-scale revenue-generating activities for women. For example, I teach women how to sew or to dye and give them a little money to get started, with the aim of enabling them to generate enough income to support themselves and their children. As the women we are supporting are illiterate, we have to come up with simplified business management methods and tools; we focus on ensuring that they understand how much they make in sales, how much it costs them to produce what they sell, and hence how much is left for them to spend on their own needs. Sometimes you meet someone who says, “I can’t do anything, I don’t know how to do it”. But if you listen carefully and point them in the right direction, the problem goes away. It is as if you give them back their ability to take action.

Eat healthy food and you will enjoy good health, which will mean you are fit to work and to fight against poverty. If you are ill, you won’t be able to work and poverty will win. Growing your own fruit and vegetables is a concrete way of fighting malnutrition. I got involved in doing this in order to fight malnutrition in children by giving them a healthy diet. We were supporting a child who was having difficulty putting on weight and was not growing normally. When we consulted a doctor, we realised that his diet consisted entirely of rice, which is all that impoverished families living in Mauritania can afford. Here in Nouakchott, it is difficult to find spare land to cultivate. But we encourage people to grow vegetables in pots or on a patch in a communal garden.

Composting is also a novel way of creating employment. I once attended a course on growing vegetables and how to use them to create compost. Which is another way of making money. Simple actions that add value. By supporting basic education, taking time to listen and promoting good health, we can all become a movement.

Aminetou Sidi, Association Santé Mère et Enfant, et Lutte contre la Malnutrition, Mauritania

This however encouraged us to get even more involved

DREAM TEAM TOGO is an international solidarity association actively involved in initiatives to support orphans, children on the street and deprived populations living in remote regions of Togo. So as to improve their living conditions.

When I was at university, I started a WhatsApp group. This was initially intended to raise money, but I then used it to gather all sorts of contributions to help orphans in my country. People mobilised and got motivated. The group grew bigger, uniting people for whom humanitarian aid was really something important. We visited an orphanage, called Mother Charity. There were babies abandoned by their parents due to a lack of financial means, or whose parents had died. We were very saddened. This however encouraged us to get even more involved.

I am eager to help, but mostly to meet and interact with the people who benefit from our work. For instance, after donating to an orphanage, we keep in touch with the team. This enables us to stay in contact with the children and the young people living there. On weekends, we often meet the children, eat together, play football and take part in various activities with them. We bring joy to them.

While filming for a program on association projects, I met a schoolboy who was participating in one of the projects. This boy often skips school to go and sell things at the market and make some money. I met him on a school day, and he was at the market wearing a school uniform. I asked him why he was not attending school. He explained that he was trying to sell objects to help his parents and pay for his education. This market only took place once a week, on Fridays, and if he missed it, it would be hard to make ends meet during the rest of the week. This encounter encouraged me to stay involved and I wanted to try and understand how helping people can lead to learning about them.

We aim to work and take part in humanitarian initiatives in a professional, honest way, and this encourages other people to work with us as well. I want to give hope to people at the orphanage and to communities who benefit from what we do. I want to bring joy to them.

Nenonene Koffimensahn, Association Dream Team Togo, Togo
Following the consultation on the theme choice for the years 2022-2023, the Forum on Overcoming Extreme Poverty received 157 contributions from 40 countries, coming from more than 200 individuals, groups or associations, representing 81 responses.

**Our conviction to leave no one behind is strengthened because of the health crisis**

“Considering the fragility of implemented policies, it is essential to build policies that appeal to the intelligence of all, especially those in extreme poverty”. Blaise, Cameroon

“COVID has only deepened the already existing inequalities across the globe. These inequalities are at the heart of the World Day for Overcoming Extreme Poverty”. Collectif France

**Creating a society without extreme poverty means:**

Solidarity, responsibility, quality education, decent livelihoods and respect for nature

“This is in line with our concerns and actions, and I believe it is a guarantee for the future. I believe that we must be able to ensure this ‘living in dignity’ for every human being, and ensuring sustenance and education means laying the foundations.” Ionut, Romania

“We are all invited to participate actively in the achievement of the dignity of all the inhabitants of the planet”. Elvira, Colombia

**Respect for human dignity is what guides our actions for a world without poverty**

“The recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.”

Manal, Algérie

“We must fight for dignity together because my dignity means nothing if my neighbour has none.” Bertine, Burkina

The theme for the International Day for Eradication of Poverty on October 17, 2022 is:

**Dignity for all in practice:**

The commitments we make together for social justice, peace and the planet

The Forum on Overcoming Extreme Poverty is part of ATD Fourth World International. But those who join The Forum maintain their independence from ATD.

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N° 107, May 2022