Having helped coordinate the international programme of collaborative research that culminated in the publication of *The Hidden Dimensions of Poverty* report, I can attest the great lengths to which the researchers went in order to ensure that the results were of the highest quality, despite the difficulties they sometimes faced. For three years, university professors, professional practitioners and people living in poverty worked extremely hard together, in five languages, to produce a report of which they are justifiably proud and which they very much hope will be genuinely useful in the fight against extreme poverty.

Our dialogue with 40 readers of the *Letter to Friends Around the World* has been most encouraging in this respect. It shows that the research output — nine dimensions of poverty and five modifying factors — is used by those active in the fight against poverty as a new framework within which to analyse the context of their work. Using the framework, explained one participant, makes it possible “to go from a dialogue in which those in poverty are held responsible for their own fate to one in which responsibility is shared”. “Shame is shifted from one side to the other” wrote another. Another participant pointed out that on a tip where thousands survive by picking waste the scavengers are “numb with pain”. The highly collaborative research method has also encouraged all the participants to think carefully about how they operate and about the nature of their relationships with those who live in the greatest poverty. What in reality is the best way of involving them in projects so that no-one is left behind? How can we gain their confidence rather than do their thinking for them? How can we — before we ask them to share ideas with others — give them time to formulate their thoughts with their peers, thus increasing their “power to act”? “This report helps us to position ourselves. Let’s make it our bible”, wrote one practitioner.

Joseph Wresinski, founder of ATD Fourth World, said: “All who humbly walk with those in extreme poverty go from pain, to surprise then to wonder”. So it was with this international programme of collaborative research. When the COP26 climate summit opened in Glasgow a young ecologist from Kenya declared “With my own eyes I have seen three young children in tears by the side of a dried-up river after walking 20 kilometres with their mother to find water”.

Let us continue to walk hand in hand with these children and their parents, so that we can both appreciate their pain and help them to dispel it, working together to reduce poverty whilst showing respect for our planet and for all those who inhabit it.

**Xavier Godinot, The Hidden Dimensions of Poverty Research Coordinator**
The disempowerment described in the report reminds Sister Thérèse of her relationship with Josiane. I saw the enormous solitude of this woman who saw no one, who got dressed up Friday evenings for the weekends when she would eke out a living by hitchhiking. Milla, who is also involved in prostitution, let me know pretty quickly that, “she is the poorest.” I knew, right then, that I would always be there for Josiane.

I wanted to keep being in service to the resources she had within her. I wanted to listen to her and through our relationship help set in motion what she carries inside. I took note of what she said: “I can’t take it anymore, I’m going to explode,” “I’m going to die.” How many times did I hear these words? Josiane’s life was close to unbearable

She already had children who were taken from her at birth. “They were born dead,” she was told. She doesn’t believe a word of it! Josiane was pregnant again. She was under a lot of pressure to have an abortion because she was judged incapable of raising a child. She is lucid: “I won’t give birth at that place where the association (for single mothers) already sent me. I’d rather give birth on the sidewalk!”

To dare to bring her baby into this world she had to face the social workers and society, which was a fight; a form of action. I admired her courage, her decision, and her commitment on behalf of her child. Josiane couldn’t stand for others to decide for her. She wanted to free herself from this threat and decide for herself.

(...)

When her son, at four years of age, was old enough to go to school, the association put him in an orphanage while, at the same time, Josiane was imprisoned under the pretext that she stole a telephone. Everything fell apart: deprived of any contact with his mother, the boy became depressed. Josiane lost her work and her housing because the rent wasn’t being paid. She got out of prison after a few months, without a decision on her case, during winter, and was out on the street.

The association hired her as a cleaning lady. Josiane became dependent on the association for her low-wage salary (half of the official minimum), and even for all her decisions. She was afraid. She feared they wanted to keep her from having a relationship with her that her private life was under a microscope as well as her way of keeping up her lodging. And she was afraid they could fire her if she resisted.

Several times I was rebuked or heard how displeased the association was. I was shocked by their response: “For us what counts is the child,” they said repeatedly. And I replied, “for me what counts is the two people - the mother and the child, and the relationship between them.” I just couldn’t accept that Josiane was left out of the picture, as though she didn’t count at all.

Thérèse R., Libanon

To recognise the knowledge and the worth of people living in poverty

When someone has to get up every day and think about how they are going to feed their children, how to survive; people have neither the time nor the power to decide about their own lives and it is not easy to get involved in collective decisions, to participate politically, to understand how societal structures work in order to contribute. Nevertheless, communities have created collective ways to get organised and respond to uncertainty and social violence. In my neighbourhood, for example, when there was no drinking water, people would connect hoses at 3 in the morning in places where there was water. What’s interesting is that it wasn’t one person taking water for themselves, rather they knocked on all the houses, we knew that it was about water and we got our containers ready - they informed us collectively so that we could all have water. I grew up with the efforts of my mum and my dad trying to keep us going, because there are 4 of us children, and at the same time is a spirit of a community working together. It’s important to understand that struggle and that resistance, as well as all the social and judicial injustices.

Understand that there are people who are 100% behind this resistance, but that there are also people who in their personal circumstances can’t find a way of tackling such situations. (...) It is also important to give recognition to the so-called poor communities, for example on environmental matters. I remember that we never used plastic bags because you had to buy them, so people carried a basket or a cloth bag, (...) To find a bicycle, fix it up and you can travel around. All of this seems to be kind of invisible because nowadays it’s fashionable, people have ecological awareness and it poor people have already been doing all of these things to show respect for the environment. It’s also closely linked to traditions that are anti-consumerism, anti-capitalist.

The research on The Hidden Dimensions of Poverty is inspiring because it gives a voice to people living in situations of poverty. It recognises their knowledge and their worth, as well as how they have had to deal with these situations of poverty. They also make suggestions.

Sandra S., Colombie
**Consider Poverty as a Collective Problem**

My commitment to the cause of ending poverty stems from my personal experience. Since reading the report, I have started using the phrase ‘people/person subjected to poverty’ instead of ‘the poor’. That strikes me as more accurate.

The report affirms that the existence of poverty burdens the entire society. Within every human subjected to poverty, are latent talents which are more likely to be never discovered and/or developed and/or harnessed. And the less the community – whether we define it as a country or the whole of humanity – is able to harness the talents of its constituents, the less progress it is likely to witness, and the more burden of frustration, dejection and violence borne of the inability to give expression to innate potential it would have to bear.

(…)

Social and environmental factors, and not personal failings, determine whether people are subjected to poverty or not. And I think that it is important that we emphasize this so that those with ‘privilege’ who have hitherto been apathetic towards the fight to end poverty, as a consequence of the dominant narrative which blames those subjected to poverty for the existence of poverty, may be shaken off their apathy. The research, I would argue, has made available the much-needed fact-driven evidence to confront poverty as a collective problem – and to advance the fight to end it.

Gideon A., Nigeria

**We decided to rethink our way of acting**

We decided to rethink our way of acting, no longer working just on essential needs or questions of housing or access to decent work or something to eat. We decided to organize local dialogues with people from the area to encourage good community relations and the integration of internally displaced people from the north-west and south-west of Cameroon. They feel stigmatized and misunderstood when passers-by look down on them or scorn them. Having already lost everything, work, housing, and now being unable to make a living, they feel rejected. Often these same people don’t have any say. They are left out by the local authorities and others decide for them. I remember a woman who told us that because they don’t have a voting card, their opinion doesn’t count. Consequently, they have other worries, they are not interested in public policy about their environment and they suffer abuse, not only from the establishment, but also from rich people around them.

Noting that these people who live in poverty really have skills as is noted in the report, we turned to training and associating people living in poverty to work on community projects set up in the area. We also thought about the aspect of unrecognized contributions, of supporting a social and craft economy. With these people who even have means, skills, habits, qualities to develop, we decided to encourage this local know-how to really take on board their participation in local development plans in order to give equal access to social rights (education, health, safety etc.).

In conclusion we thought about reinforcing the obvious resilience of the vulnerable people and the working class areas. This, despite the fact that they are exposed to afflictions of all sorts such as alcoholism, prostitution etc. It remains true that people living in extreme poverty develop resilience to it every day.

Martinien M., Cameroun

**We all can sit on a chair**

I have been working for the last 20 years with waste pickers on the landfill site, in New Delhi. there are thousands of waste pickers involved, in the landfill site and the city, cleaning up, picking up, without any medical protection in the sense like gloves and masks, or any equipment. They are doing everything with their bare hands. And even at the landfill sites, the familiar sight is women, men, small children, all digging for whatever waste they can find and that they can sell and make some kind of revenue. They have never been to school and have lots of health problems, there are stray animals out there, the dogs are wild, there are snakes out there, … And hearing their voices and reading it in the report, and I realized what a struggle it is every day to think “next day, where are they going to find the food?” I am not talking about education or health care because we are far away from that. It’s just that: the survival, the battle. We were able to create a livelihood program for more 1200 waste pickers (…) most of these women have never sat on chairs. Socially and morally and economically, the concept of chairs has been denied from them since birth. Even if you call them in our offices, they would sit on the floor, they will never sit on the chair. This is how dis-empowered they are. But once they start working and start coming to the units regularly, then obviously they have to sit on chairs. And over time they get into such a habit of sitting on a chair, that today, it is quite normal for them to walk into any government office or so and sit on the chair. But it has taken us many years for that. I know that it’s not the chair. It’s a whole journey, of them and us. Where we are hand in hand, travelling together, and we reached the position where we all can sit on a chair. (…)

It’s a valuable report. Let’s not make it just another report that is lying around. Let’s make it our book of wisdom. It is really a remarkable document and we need to carry it forward.

Anita A., India
Some words from this year that fit with the theme “building forward together: ending persistent poverty, respecting all people and our planet”

Barclay: “It was unbelievable, I tried to resist the rising river, but the water came into the house with such a speed. We were only able to save our children and some furniture. We did not know where to go. We had to move again, go back to my old neighbourhood. The neighbourhood of all dangers. My story, my misfortune, my suffering can be the fate of all of us. We must unite, listen to each other, work together for the future of our children and of all of us”.

La Bise (vacation centre in France): “We’ve discovered another world. I didn’t know the countryside was like that. The garden, with all kinds of fruits and vegetables. It’s interesting to see how you harvest them, how they are planted, if they are trees or small shrubs, if they are in the ground or up high. In truth, here, it is to cultivate oneself. It’s not just about cultivating the land. There is also the mind. Being human again and not just a number, or a poverty quota. This is real life. It is also living in the middle of this land that makes us grow”.

Gerry S.: “With Climate Change, warmer air carries more water, so now Appalachians face damage from flooding. These costs are prohibitive for people already financially strapped. People who live in trailers and most of the middle class have no funds to relocate. Greener and more diversified jobs are not coming to our area because the region has been left behind both by government and by the mining industry”.

Ana Lucia: “I believe in the potential of many women, those who are fighting where they live. I dream of a fairer world, more equal, where all people have their rights recognized and guaranteed. I dream of the preservation of our environment, of our planet, so that it can be seen with new and different eyes. I dream that eradication of poverty is for all nations”.

Words from friends

“Dirt is a lack of respect for those who clean and a lack of respect for the earth. Dirt is a lack of respect for those who clean and a lack of respect for the earth.”

Tapori children from Reunion Island

“Deprivation means that many parents are unable to send their children to school. In the city, many children are seen walking the streets with merchandise despite the risk of accidents, kidnapping and abuse.”

Gaëlle, field facilitator, Cameroon

“The person who chooses ‘second hand’ products, thus doing something about the wastage of limited goods, is an example.”

Participant in Naila event, Germany

“Education that includes the major challenges of protecting the earth will be needed to build a future generation of experts and students; the dads and mums of tomorrow who will have to engage themselves alongside the poorest families to understand what they are going through today to avoid what may be the fate of all of us tomorrow.”

Speech at October 17 webinar, participant from India

“My parents had a lot of difficulties and so do I, even though we struggle. Participating, talking with others, breaking through those fears that we carry from generation to generation, lifts our heads. It may not seem to have a big impact on society, but it does a lot.”

Berta, Bolivia

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Printed by ATD Fourth World.
N° 106, December 2021