

LETTER TO FRIENDS

AROUND THE WORLD

FORUM ON OVERCOMING EXTREME POVERTY



International Movement ATD Fourth World
12, rue Pasteur - 95480 Pierrelaye - France

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**"EVERYTHING IS BORN FROM A SHARED LIFE,
NOT FROM A THEORY" ¹**

In a neighbourhood of Tananarive recently flooded by storms, we are thinking with members of the Movement about the projects and actions we take on together. What is the most important thing? Where should we start? Mr Joseph joins the conversation: *"The most important thing is creativity"*. His comment intrigues us, *"Tell us what you mean."* Around ten years ago, despite his best efforts, life was extremely difficult for himself and his family. Then, with neighbours, ATD Fourth World volunteers and partners, he participated in creating MMM, a cooperative to overcome hunger and poverty, by learning and working together: *"To start with we got together for half a day every week. We tried to make things we could sell, and then it became one day, and then two days... We didn't know what we should do. We were trying, searching, learning; but we were together..."* When you're faced with the misery of poverty you can only open up pathways to the future by combining everybody's bravery and intelligence, by standing together, each and every one of us at the same level.

This autumn, at the end of 2015, the world is on the cusp of some important events. In September, a United Nations Summit will set the Sustainable Development Goals up until

2030. And in December, the Paris Conference on climate change will take place. Everywhere, leaders and people participating in the political, cultural, spiritual and social life of our countries are on the move. They are asking questions about what direction to take, and what the priorities for action over the next 15 years should be. These are important and difficult questions. Is there room in this debate for the ideas of Mr Joseph?

People who are resisting poverty every day are the first to suffer from the negative impact of climate change. If we start by connecting with them in a new way, then we could be more creative when facing up to the huge challenges of today. This is what the UN invites us to do, this 17 October. ²

Isabelle Perrin, Director General
International Movement ATD Fourth World

1. Joseph Wresinski.

2. The UN invites us to mark next 17 October, the World Day for Overcoming Poverty, with this theme "Building a sustainable future: Coming together to end poverty and discrimination".



WORDS FROM THE FORUM ON OVERCOMING EXTREME POVERTY TEAM

"Faced with the misery of poverty, you can only open up pathways to the future that bind us together, with equality, by combining our courage and our intelligence." This is what Mr Joseph from Madagascar and many others from around the world tell us.

In Bangladesh, their concern for what young people are going through led the association Mati to create a dedicated youth centre. Luis C., welcomes people experiencing social exclusion into his home in Guatemala. Thanks to this shared communal life, he now considers them as part of his family. Through offering to create a "Garden of Solidarity", Marine P., has seen a sense of trust and pride grow within the

children from an orphanage in Morocco. Blaise N., from Cameroon, takes time with each person he meets to allow him to discover their value and potential, and bring it to the fore.

Mr. Joseph also tells us that "the most important thing is creativity," so we invite you all, wherever you are, to be creative and recognise all these personal efforts and dedication by celebrating 17 October 2015, World Day for Overcoming Extreme Poverty. **"Building a sustainable future: coming together to end poverty and discrimination"** is the theme chosen for this year.

● A YOUTH CENTRE FOR A BETTER FUTURE

MATI is an NGO that has been working in the north of Bangladesh since 1997. Their aim is to combine the human forces of energy and love in the universal fight against poverty and for a life in dignity for all human beings. Here's news about their opening of a youth centre.

Development begins at your own front door. It has been a long-standing concern of MATI to include people living in Sankipara (around 30,000 people) in our work. Amongst the apartment blocks of the better off live many poor people in huts made out of bamboo and corrugated iron sheets that sprout from the ground like weeds.

There are scarcely any training opportunities for young people from poor families since few have completed their school education. Those who want to do an "apprenticeship" generally work for the owner of a shop where at first they work without pay. Due to their lack of education and bureaucratic hurdles, as well as widespread corruption, they find it hard to access social and State services. So, they have little chance to overcome their poverty. All that remains for boys is working as day labourers, rickshaw drivers and load carriers. For girls who don't want to work at the large textile manufacturers in the capital, it means work as domestics or little jobs working from home.

There is a large number of unemployed young people in Sankipara hanging around the streets without any prospects. In 2008, to get them involved, MATI suggested they organise some activities together. In discussion groups they put forward their own ideas for a youth centre. They wanted a library, learn how to use a computer, read newspapers and play board games. They also wanted to organise entertainment events as there weren't any on offer for them. Girls found that interesting because they could then go to events like this in a centre without their parents worrying about their safety.

This project became a reality in April 2014 with support from a German-based development organisation specialised in social housing. We want the centre to become a place where young people from different religious backgrounds who want a better future can learn and meet together.

Education has to be tailored to very specific needs, so-called "life skills". It has to provide fundamental tools for dealing with life; help with searching and preparing for employment. It has to address important questions like: What can I do differently? What could I do better in my life? What does it mean to take on responsibility? How do I deal with disappointments and frustrations? MATI also works on other important issues such as women's rights, climate change and the protection of the environment.

ANDREA R., BANGLADESH

● THEY ARE MY FAMILY

Luis C. has created a project for men who have experienced exclusion and addiction. Recognising that there was nowhere for them to go when they left rehabilitation centres, he rented a house to welcome them and help them to move on.

"I started by consulting people who lived and worked in the street, and visiting rehab centres. I thought it was important to find a place in Guatemala City, the capital, where mistrust of them is so strong. At the moment, I have four people and since the start, 12 men have passed through, most of them between 18 and 35 years old.

They can stay as long as they like, there is no predetermined length of time. Living as a community, we all share the cooking and the cleaning, and each person does their laundry.

Each person moves forward at his own pace in this communal life. We learn to live together and to create a fraternal atmosphere, and if there are any conflicts, we talk and resolve them.

When they arrive at the house, each person writes a sort of plan to get his life back on track and reconnect with the positive experiences of their life. We base our approach on the principle of freedom/responsibility.

At weekends, they pick up again the studies that they had dropped out of. We found sponsors to provide financial support and some work to cover daily expenses and household costs. In order that that they could learn new things, like cooking for example, we found short courses and volunteering opportunities in local associations.

When we have difficulties finding the money for the rent, we look together for a solution. If anyone can't contribute financially, he contributes through work, so in effect everyone has something to contribute.



I'm in favour of financial independence for the project, as I don't want others to set objectives for us or demand results which are not always possible to measure or to obtain immediately. We therefore have to be more creative. Recently, we have opened a shop in which we sell clothes, shoes and second-hand furniture, and created a vegetable garden where we grow onions, peppers, chilli, celery, coriander and garlic.

Amongst those who have lived in the house, some have managed to move on very successfully. I have learnt that no one can live someone else's life for them. Understanding other people's lives has made me more human, more sensitive and, curiously, stronger. This has made me be interested in these people who I used to mistrust and who today are my family."

LUIS C. GUATEMALA

● A GARDEN FOR THE CHILDREN

The 'Dar al Atfal' children's home at Sidi Bernoussi in Casablanca welcomes about 300 children aged between 6 and 18 years old. Most of them have been abandoned, orphaned, or are from families in great difficulty or broken homes.

These children need activities which will enrich their daily lives and help them discover new ideas, through activities which are extracurricular, manual, fun and educational.

I have been interested in agroecology and horticulture since 2011. I wanted to develop this field in Morocco as I was convinced that agroecology could provide an answer to social and environmental challenges.

As I volunteered in the children's home, I wanted to give the children a chance to experience a vegetable garden.

In order to get started and to find out how the children would react, we started with a small piece of land. The result: the children adored it!



Workshops were organised for Saturday afternoons. At the beginning of the project, an expert came to talk to the children about the principles of agroecology. We started with planting various seasonal vegetables and flowers, either as seeds in pots or sowing directly into the ground, and the group of young children looked after the garden. And finally the time came to harvest the vegetables and flowers.

Thanks to the help of donors, the children's centre at Sidi Bernoussi was able to buy some gardening materials, organic compost, the first plants and seeds, and to pay the facilitator.

The project had a significant social and environmental impact. The harvesting of the vegetables and flowers gave the children a real feeling of confidence and pride. Little by little, the children understood the impor-

tance of respecting the environment and made a bond with the earth.

MARINE P, DAR AL ATFAL CHILDREN'S HOME, MOROCCO



● WHAT I AM GOING TO SHARE WITH YOU COMES STRAIGHT FROM THE HEART

Everything concerned with poverty, every person left by the wayside, involves me, and I go to see. My work is very simple: I go into the neighbourhoods, I walk around, usually nobody counts the poor, but you can always find them.

My desire is to see that the person has a certain dignity; for them to stand up straight, to hold on. It's a question of presence. When I go up to them, I always say "I have nothing to give you, but I've come to say to you: you're important to me. Others may scorn you, but there is somebody who is here for you for whom you have great value." This is really important. What counts for me is to be present, to be with them, because that's vital for the poorest. They're used to thinking they are cursed. You have to be able to answer, to

say things that create optimism: "Nothing is lost, another life is possible".

The attitudes I cultivate are: presence, listening, building capacities, respect. Poor people talk a lot; they have a lot to say. Usually nobody listens to them, but I always take the time to listen. When I visit them, we sit down together and talk, and talk. I also try to show them that despite everything another life is possible, that they shouldn't think they are the damned of the earth. This is the most difficult thing to say, because they say, "How are we going to find a solution?" It's true that it's an existential problem: the families don't even have enough to eat. When they ask, "How are we going to find a solution? Tell us!" the temptation is to say, "OK, here's 1,000 francs". What happens after that?

Often I try to get them to look at things differently: "You have potential, you are the one who can get yourself out of the predicament you find yourself in. Poverty isn't a curse; it's a situation that can arise in anybody's life. One day you're rich, the next you're poor. You have capacities. I usually say to them "Tell me, you have qualities don't you?" "Yes". "Tell me what are just 10 qualities that you think you have; just 10". This introspective approach is difficult but helps the person to realise they are worth something. If you have capacities, talents, qualities, then you can do something. So usually they say to you: "No listen, it's other people who should tell us this". I say, "No, you can, look at yourself, look at what you're capable of doing." That's when the person starts to say "OK, I think I can do this, I'm this, I'm that, etc." And I catch hold of one of their main qualities. Development of potential is very important. When you look at someone positively, it's a powerful lever that gives us the strength to surpass ourselves.

Respect the person in poverty for who they are, don't tell them what to do. I think that examples speak louder than words.

BLAISE N. CAMEROON



SEEN ON THE WEBSITE

Travelling Exhibition:

"THE LETTER'S COLOURS - PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD ARE MAKING A COMMITMENT TO REJECT POVERTY"

This exhibition has been put together by the Forum on Overcoming Extreme Poverty. It brings together extracts of articles taken from the Letter to Friends Around the World and showcases the drawings by Hélène Perdereau, who has faithfully accompanied us for over 20 years.

The aim of this exhibition is to publicise the actions and initiatives of people around the world who are rallying to fight against poverty. It is a way of taking the initiative to meet people, communicate, raise awareness and mobilise society to participate in this fight.

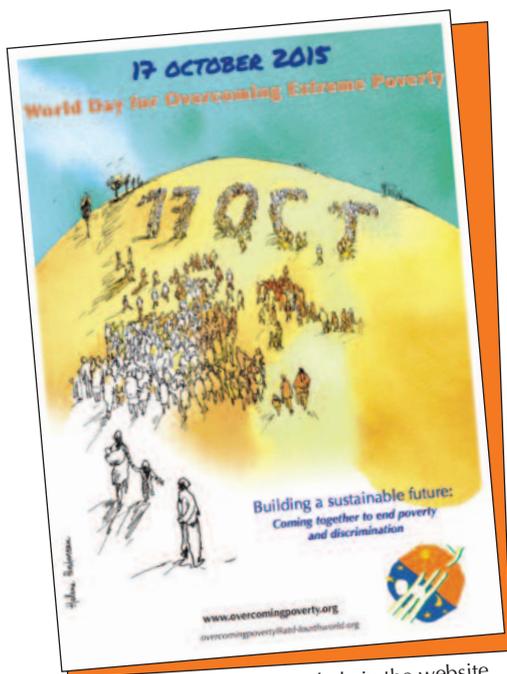
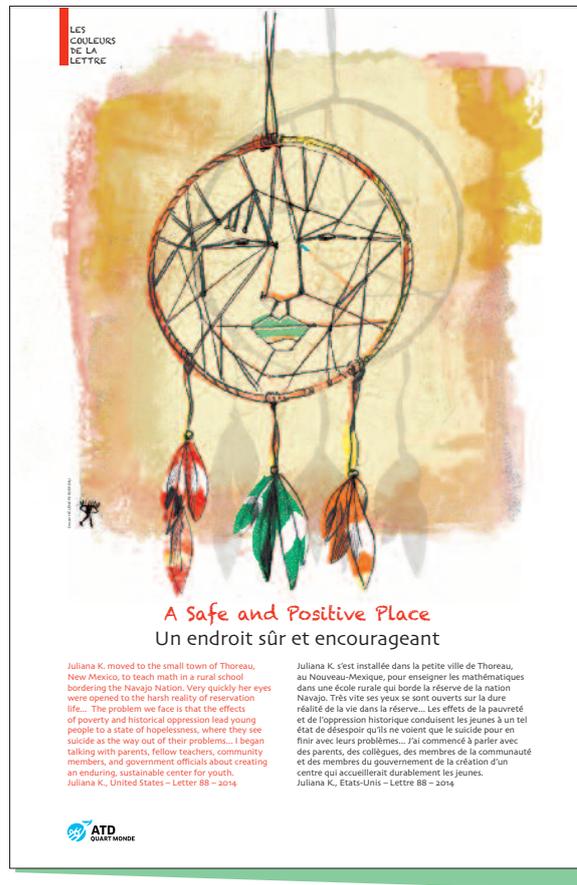
It is intended to be a travelling exhibition. It consists of about thirty 80 x120 cm or 29.7 x 42 cm posters, an example of which you can see here.

You can read about it on our website:

<http://overcomingpoverty.org/article/the-letters-colours>

If you have a project that could be supported by this exhibition, don't hesitate to contact us (overcomingpoverty@atd-fourthworld.org) to discuss the different options.

We hope that it will travel over the coming years.



Poster can be downloaded via the website or order it from us.
(<http://overcomingpoverty.org/toolbox/mobilisation>)

LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

• I found the content of the latest Letter to Friends very moving and it raises questions within me. This Letter that you publish is very interesting and positive because the testimonies motivate and boost us. It's important to discover others projects and other people's commitments. I've worked for thirty years in Peru and during this time, I have received a lot more than I have given back. I think that is the idea; support people who need it without expecting anything in return. Give them the support they need and make them feel that they are not alone.

Sister Maria S., Colombia

• The image that we convey of ourselves is the basis on which others judge and assess us. If we are able to project and manage a positive image, we improve our self-esteem and our behaviour in society and at work. This has a decisive impact on our capacity to communicate. This is why Espaço T created the Center for Personal Image in the City of Cerco (one of the most excluded neighbourhoods in the city of Porto). The Centre addresses the need to provide job seekers from the neighbourhood with better resources when they attend a job interview, by improving their image and showing them what to highlight and what to avoid doing during a job interview, for example.

Cláudia O., Espaço T, Portugal

You can also share your observations and your experiences on the website: www.overcomingpoverty.org or by email: overcomingpoverty@atd-fourthworld.org

The "Forum on Overcoming Extreme Poverty" 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 Forum on Overcoming Extreme Poverty 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: overcomingpoverty@atd-fourthworld.org Internet: www.overcomingpoverty.org Subscription \$8/8€ per annum - Support subscription: \$10/10€ per annum. © International Movement ATD Fourth World - Printed by ATD Fourth World - Méry-sur-Oise - No 92 - September 2015.

ILLUSTRATIONS FROM
HELENE PERDREAU,
A LONG TIME FRIEND AND
SUPPORTER OF THE
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PAGE SETUP: LYDIE ROUFFET