

LETTER TO FRIENDS AROUND THE WORLD FORUM ON OVERCOMING EXTREME POVERTY



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

JUNE 2013 – N° 83

IT WAS MY PARENTS' COURAGE THAT KEPT US GOING

At Ouagadougou, Fatimata's words resounded "We often had nothing to eat, even in the evening. But we still went to school nevertheless. I know it was my parents' courage that kept us going. Otherwise it would've been impossible." That was last March, at one of the international seminars where members of the ATD Fourth World Movement and various partners worked to evaluate the impact of the Millennium Development Goals. This task was carried out with the participation of families living in extreme poverty, who contributed in this way to defining constructive proposals to bring an end to the violence of poverty. Education turned out to be a central concern.

In both North and South, families confronted by extreme poverty get up every morning to deal with the daily emergencies, and also with this constant anxiety in their hearts: who is going to work with us, join with us in our efforts to ensure our children are able to learn, to exist in the community, to be part of the world, and contribute to its future?

In Burkina Faso, and also in the other gatherings in Belgium and the Philippines, participants reminded us that the worst thing for the poorest children is that schools usually don't expect anything from them. On top of hunger, unsuitable housing, threats of eviction, insufficient income and lack of identity papers, this undermines their self-confidence and persuades them they are incapable of learning. The courage and experience of their parents are not expected either, and their opinion is mostly treated with a lack of interest and respect. This is why the abyss so many children fall into is deepening, when all they want to do is develop and share their intelligence, creativity and friendship with others.

On the occasion of 17 October, the World Day for Overcoming Extreme Poverty, let's assert together once more that projects and policies to bring an end to poverty must be devised, undertaken and evaluated using the experience and knowledge of children and adults who resist poverty day after day.

Isabelle Perrin, Director General
International Movement ATD Fourth World



WORDS FROM THE FORUM ON OVERCOMING EXTREME POVERTY TEAM

Every day correspondents from the Forum on Overcoming Extreme Poverty have to cope with desperate situations. They do so with acts of courage and solidarity that break through isolation and seclusion. They wonder who will join them in this?

In Tanzania, Mbaraka shares his struggle to help the most weary to access medical care. In Asia, a support centre for fishermen and sailors tries to ensure that these seafaring families aren't alone in facing harsh working and living conditions. And in Madagascar, Joel tells us how he and other young people in his neighbourhood try to create a network of mutual support at the heart of their own community, so that their dead can be buried with dignity.

Poverty and exclusion are ever present in our letters and emails and there are many other examples that we could

share with you. Correspondents stress the need to face it in a different way, and this becomes clear when we talk about education. What kind of education system is needed so that children do not grow up worrying what tomorrow will bring? How can we make the most of the knowledge and experience of those living in extreme poverty? In Mozambique, Elisabeth's ambitions to create a school that is truly open to the world; a school which offers children, especially for the poorest amongst them, a future.

Sharing our efforts and our commitment to break the vicious circle of extreme poverty can be an inspiration to others. Many of you tell us that Our *Letter to Friends Around the World* is one way we can do this. The World Day for Overcoming Extreme Poverty, held on 17 October, is another. Don't hesitate to tell others about them and let us know about your own projects and activities.

● LEARNING WITH AN ENTIRE PEOPLE

Elisabeth S. has been living in Mozambique since 2009. She also lived there between 1996 and 1999. She works at the Fonte-Boa Mission, located in the centre of Mozambique. It is a fertile region, but because of the farmers' isolation, the people are very poor.

We get the impression everything remains to be done here. Over the last 10 years we have seen regression rather than progress. This is very sad. The people are very poor, friendly and hospitable.

At the Mission, they have access to schooling. For example, there are lessons in Portuguese, in classrooms containing sixty or so teenagers, all very well brought up and disciplined.

There are also other actions:

- There is a study room, a quiet place where pupils can study, do their homework, learn to use a computer and watch films.
- The computers are donated and sent by friends from Portugal.
- The drawing competition is a huge success. Many children and young people show their wonderful drawings, expressing their dreams, talent and imagination.
- In the sewing lessons, the girls make handbags, jackets and other garments that they are proud and happy to wear. This helps them overcome problems in their personal and family lives, and emotional problems too.
- The primary school is attended by 20 very poor children aged 3 to 10. These children really deserve to be cared for, they are adorable and attentive. At Christmas, a crib and a tree are put up with everybody's help, and we organise a tea party, presents, a film and ... 5 Father Christmases!
- There is also another project which occupies us throughout the year: the Education Grants for Young Women, to enable them to benefit from higher education. We have 13 grant holders. This means organising meetings with them, communicating every day by e-mail, and above all being present when they experience difficulties. Last year all of the grant holders passed the exam! This is a source of great joy; they will be able to help build a better-informed and fairer society, with greater capacities.

I am very happy to serve and to learn with these people, both the little ones and the elders whom I meet as I walk along the endless roads of this country.

ELIZABETH S., MOZAMBIQUE



● WE ARE A YOUTH SOLIDARITY GROUP

Joel is a young person who lives in the town of Mahajanga, on the west coast of Madagascar. He and his family have had a hard life. He speaks about his commitment towards others in his neighbourhood.

Many young people have turned to alcohol and drugs. I belong to the scout movement and we learn to live in friendship and solidarity; "love your neighbour as you love yourself." I've always told the young people in my neighbourhood to stop drinking and smoking. I'm very happy that one young person has been able to stop.

In my neighbourhood there's a contribution to be paid every time somebody dies. Six months ago there was a death in a family, none of the neighbours or people from the community office came. The family had to face their bereavement on their own. Together with some young people, we decided to help the family by preparing the coffin, staying for the wake, going to collect wood for the kitchen, and digging the grave.

We realised that this family is one of the poorest in the neighbourhood and, at the time the contributions are requested, which happens fairly often in the life of a neighbourhood, the family had nothing in the house with which they could pay. With some young people, we got together to help the family, not just for the burial but in cleaning up the neighbourhood. We are 25 young people and through dredging the canals and weeding we were able to contribute fully. We are not an association in the eyes of the state but just a group of young people in solidarity with others.

It was the 17 of October that persuaded me to join the ATD Fourth World Movement because I love helping others, even if I'm as poor as Naoufal. I love children and I enjoy teaching them things. Now I'm looking for a way for my mates in the neighbourhood to know and get involved with the Movement because we need young people. I love my friends; when they come to my house and I'm eating, I always share my meal with them even if I never eat at their place.

Last month my grandmother died and many people from the neighbourhood came because my friends and I help a lot when somebody dies in the neighbourhood.

JOEL H., MADAGASCAR



● THOUSANDS OF UNTOLD STORIES

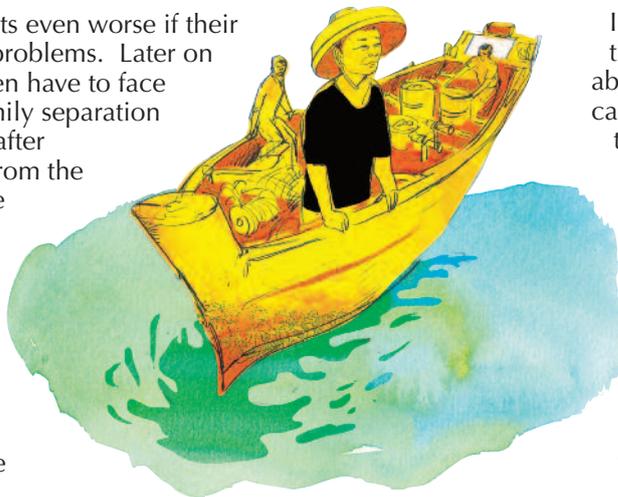
The PCT Seamen's/Fishermen's Service Center was established in 1986 at the fish market of Chi-chin in Kaohsiung. The origins of the Service Center began with the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT). It had come to the attention of several committee members that the number of ships in the area that were meeting disasters at sea, and also being detained in foreign ports was steadily increasing. They decided to start a program to support the fishing community.

The Service Center helped Yong * and his family. His wife had come to the Center asking for help because of her husband's unemployment and the fact that their house could be taken away. We asked her to bring Yong in so we could understand better his needs, so he could receive the proper assistance. She told us that her husband has spent almost all of his life on boats that he could barely communicate with others.

Yong's wife described her husband's miserable life. She spoke of harsh employers and unpaid salaries. Yong had a severe health condition and no labour or health insurance. We applied for emergency assistance. We supported him but the situation went progressively worse. His daughter ran away from home and his wife divorced him. We accompanied Yong throughout his hospitalisation, death and funeral.

This is merely one of the miserable tales out of thousands of seamen's untold stories. Almost all of the seamen and fishing crews have to work their whole life at sea in order to support their family. The sea is like an invisible prison holding them back from home.

Their life gets even worse if their family has problems. Later on these seamen have to face poverty, family separation and illness after getting off from the boat. At the end of their lives, they will be in debt with unpaid health insurance, and a huge bill from the hospital.



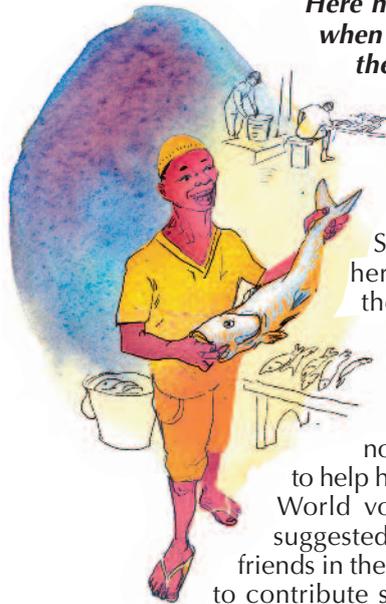
The Service Center help seafarers and fishermen to receive the necessary salary payments and safety at work. They also help them to find new jobs and will also visit them at hospital or at home if necessary. They want to improve the fairness of the fishing business.

FROM THE PCT SEAMEN'S/FISHERMEN'S
SERVICE CENTER NEWSLETTER,
KAOHSIUNG, THE SOUTH OF THE ISLAND OF TAIWAN

* Yong means "brave" in Chinese

● RALLYING TOGETHER FOR A FRIEND

Mbaraka K. has been a friend of the ATD Fourth World Movement in Tanzania for several years. Here he tells us what happened when one of the workers from the fish market fell ill in Dar es Salaam.



I was at the fish market and I met a man that was sick. His name was Shabani and he had a hernia. He was working at the market frying fish. He was suffering and in a lot of pain. Shabani had no brothers, sisters or family and was homeless. I did not have the financial means to help him. I asked an ATD Fourth World volunteer for advice. He suggested that I contact the other friends in the market, and ask everyone to contribute some money towards the operation. We received some donations from the people in the fish market. After collecting the money we took him to a hospital in a taxi.

Shabani saw a doctor and they gave him a bed. The doctor gave me a list of medicine that was needed, I had to go to the pharmacy to buy them. Then the doctor explained that there wasn't enough blood in the blood bank for the operation. He suggested I go back to the fish market and ask friends to donate blood.

I went back and gathered people together. At the start of the meeting there were twenty people but after I explained about donating blood, only six remained. Those six people came back to the hospital with me. I left the six people with the doctor and he took them to a room to give blood. While waiting, two people became scared and they left so there was only four left to donate blood. They tested their blood to make sure it was the right kind but only two of them had the correct type. One of the remaining two did not have enough blood to donate. So from the original twenty, only one was left that could actually give blood. I wasn't originally going to donate blood but in the end, two of us donated blood so there would be enough. The doctor and nurse asked me what my relationship was to Shabani and they were surprised when I said that he was a friend, not a relative.

The operation was successful but afterwards there was no one to take care of my him whilst he was in hospital. I took care of him for the rest of the day and evening. I gave him food and water until he was discharged. Shabani was discharged into my care. I could not bring him home because I didn't have enough space. So another friend took Shabani into his home but I continued to care for him until he was well.

Now Shabani does not have a hernia and he is a strong and healthy man. He has a small business on a fisherman island near where I live. When Shabani brings back the fish that he catches, he gives me his fish for free. We are very good friends.

MBARAKA K., TANZANIA

LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

• I always read with interest the Letter to Friends Around the World and in the issue n°81, two articles struck me in particular: 'Stand up for Justice' and 'Stand together to build the future'. They are two very important topics! Yes, because I have fought for many months with the institutions of my city to obtain a suitable place for homeless people to sleep. I am worried about human beings living in the street and exposed to the cold weather. This problem has been ignored in my city for a long time.

Sergio P., Italy

• In Letter to Friends n° 82, there was an example of a maladapted anti-poverty project in Vietnam, which reminded me a lot of the housing scheme 'La Villette' in Mauritius! Indeed I'm wondering if it's not even using the same 32 m² floor plan.

It would be great if we could make it known to these residents that here, in

ATD Fourth World's International Centre, we are thinking of them, and that we're currently working on a report detailing what we have learnt from all the seminars we've held to evaluate the Millennium Development Goals.

Xavier G., France

• This last period of preparing for the Easter holidays was really wonderful. There were the exams for the children at the school, tournaments, video forums, training, and concerts taking place in the neighbourhoods and at the Centre. In addition, there was a large participation in these activities and we really got involved in them.[...] The road is long but we must find meaning in life.[...] Certainly there are major economic problems, but we still hope that something will get better. [...] This is our life in this place of peace.

Kamenge Youth Centre, Burundi

• I received the Letter to Friends n° 82 which you continue faithfully to send to me despite my silence. And you invite me to react and give news of Algeria. What is notable at the moment is the influx of Nigerien refugees because of events in Mali (Niger is in turn affected by the war in Mali). Whole families pervade the streets of major cities in Northern Algeria. Women with children live by begging in the streets. Charity is an important tradition in Islam and people give willingly. The Algerian Red Crescent also helps these families.

As for Algerians themselves, there is no doubt that many could bear witness to families in great poverty. Like Mr. Joseph, lost in this country from which he feels alienated, even though he himself is Algerian. He lives in the street on the generosity of residents. In the winter we take him in our house overnight.

Hubert L., Algeria



SEEN ON THE WEBSITE

WORKING TOGETHER TOWARDS A WORLD WITHOUT DISCRIMINATION BUILDING ON THE EXPERIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE OF PEOPLE IN EXTREME POVERTY

Our world has been facing many crises for many years and it has become apparent to more and more people that urgent changes are needed in order to overcome these problems. One very important change is to learn from and apply the life experiences and knowledge of people living in extreme poverty. Yet, today, the valuable contribution of people living in extreme poverty is too often denied, seen as negative, ignored or not taken into account. This is blatant discrimination and denial of the dignity and human rights of people living in poverty. Therefore, our societies must break the silence of extreme poverty.

And we demonstrate how to break this silence on 17 October, every year and all year long by our solidarity with people living in poverty, our commitments and action.

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 83 - June 2013.

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

PAGE SETUP:
LYDIE ROUFFET