

LETTER TO FRIENDS AROUND THE WORLD

FORUM ON OVERCOMING EXTREME POVERTY



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- LETTER N° 103 -

OUR COMMON POINT IS OUR COMMITMENT

For years now we have been sharing our commitments and our ways of acting for a world without extreme poverty: in these days of world pandemic, we need to feel connected to share our worries, but above all to exchange our strengths, our ideas, our ways of being there for those people who are more at risk than others because they already live in utter destitution. Faced with such a situation, we may feel that our power to act has become insignificant.

We are thinking of those in fragile health or without access to good health care. We are thinking of all those children who are eager to learn and whose schools are closed. We are thinking about people who have nowhere to go but the street, or those separated from their families: prisoners, children in foster care and parents who cannot see them. Also, in our thoughts are people who had to leave their country and who struggle to find a welcoming new home. In many towns and cities throughout the world, lockdown measures have been decided. All those people who earn a living day after day can no longer have access to their means of subsistence. There is a fear that the health crisis is also becoming a hunger crisis. How is it possible not to oppose the measures to stop the progress of the virus and the vital needs, the needs for solidarity?

Yet many people — families and whole communities — have faced calamities like this before: epidemics, wars, hunger, natural disasters and the daily grind and crisis of poverty. We can learn from the experience of all these friends — from Port-au-Prince to Nueva Suyapa, Bangui to New Orleans — who have always found creative ways to come together and demonstrated acts of solidarity. This strength shown by those people or communities who live in extreme poverty, their experience you are witnessing, give us hope.

And we see people helping each other, stopping the disease in as much as they can, remaining close to the people who live in poverty, to be there in the worst of times. The youths especially want to take action and they show courage and ingenuity, just like the young leaders we know in Bangui, in the Central African Republic. In the DR of Congo, in Bukavu, other youths are looking for those in the community who are worst off and must be supported.

We are indeed mobilized by the will not to leave anyone behind during this time of emergency, but also to already call for associating the poorest people and families in the construction after the crisis. The future needs everyone's talents. Let us remain connected and attentive.

Isabelle Pypaert-Perrin

Director General of the International Movement ATD Fourth World

WORDS FROM THE TEAM

2020 is a year marked by a health crisis forcing us to follow social distancing measures and, in this year, we are aware that our commitment goes beyond power of action. This is why we decided to maintain this edition of the "Letter to Friends around the World", because we are deeply driven by the connections we have with each other and with those living in poverty. The stories you share continue to guide us on our way to solidarity, like those from Gracy in India, the young people in the Central African Republic,

and Sandra in Colombia and Bahia in Algeria who met with members of our team.

As we live through these difficult times, we are already thinking about what will follow. We will continue to work hard so that October 17 is a time when, more than ever, we can show unity in our quest for a world without poverty. As chosen by the UN, the theme to be celebrated on the day is "Acting together to achieve social and environmental justice for all".

WE DON'T WANT THE WORLD TO STAY THE SAME!

Like other people in the world, migrating from the countryside to the city, Sandra arrived at the «El Paraíso» neighborhood in the suburbs of Ciudad Bolivar with her family. It is a neighborhood at the top of a hill, without basic services, and with no means of communication or transport.

At the age of nine, Sandra became a delegate at her school, defending the rights of students and the interests of the school with local and municipal bodies. *“I won a place as a girl and as a poor person. I discovered a vocation of service. When I talked, others listened to me. I have visited many places and met a lot of people. I have been helped with my transport and my food. I would never have been able to do this alone.”*

One day, Sandra met an old lady who sold sweets outside the school. Then she stopped coming, and nobody had any news. Sandra discovered that the lady had died of hunger, alone in her house. This event deeply affected her: *“I believe that the Oasis Foundation was born at that moment, when I realized that someone could die of hunger, alone, right next to me.”*

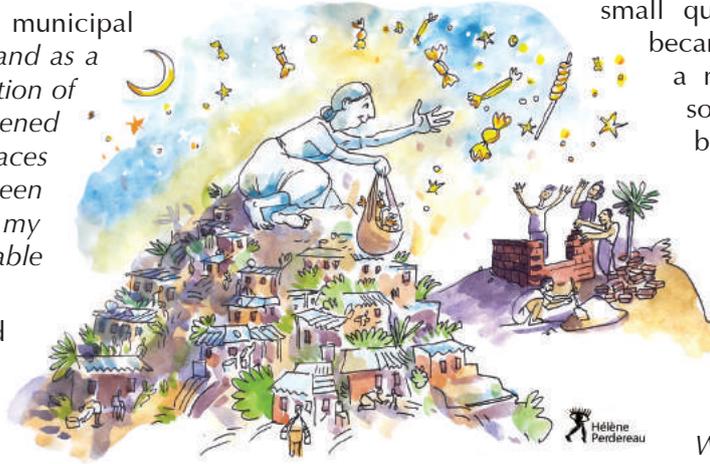
Sandra then went in search of the elderly of her neighborhood who were isolated and living in poverty and invited them

into her home. She cooked for them and offered them a place to meet. But her generosity affected the family financially, and they could no longer cope. Sandra therefore began to ask for help from her friends, who mobilized support. Her commitment also touched other people, who backed her activities financially. They bought a field and built a house with the support of neighbors. Workers gave small quantities of bricks. This then became the home of the community, a meeting place for developing solidarity, social links, and breaking down barriers.

“Today, because of Covid-19, millions of people are confined. But in the neighborhood, the elderly are selling in the street and must continue to work, and children are more exposed to the distress of their parents.

With the Foundation we have distributed food, but this alone is not enough. This situation reveals to the world the social injustice whose victims are the poor, an injustice that we have become accustomed to in a selfish and competitive system. The worst thing that could happen to us is that the world stays the same!”

Sandra S., Oasis Foundation, Colombia



I FEEL HUMBLLED TO HAVE KNOWN THESE FAMILIES

I am now a consultant in a College of Social Work in Mumbai. I first started as a community organizer and then as social worker, working in an urban slum with grass root communities of different religions and caste, particularly the schedule caste of “cobblers”. The mothers were domestic workers in the ‘well to do’ families in the neighborhood and the fathers were cobblers, sitting by the roadside mending shoes and sandals.

My role was to work for the overall development of the community. Based on the principles of Community Development the first step was building a rapport with the people, largely through informal friendly home visits. The purpose of these visits was introducing and knowing each other, understanding the living conditions and expectations of the families. Invariably and particularly the mothers’ basic concern was care of the young children, and schooling for the other children. Therefore, we were compelled to discover a viable response for access to education. Thus, began the sponsorship program.

With the support of the student social workers, we enrolled the children in the nearby municipal school. These children were the first-time learners in the family. With the financial assistance of the program they received their schoolbooks and other educational

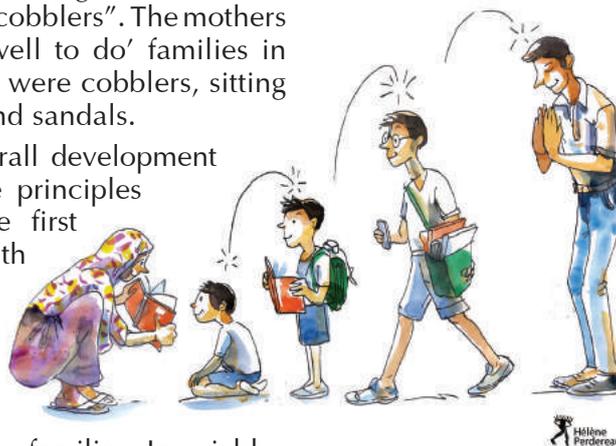
material, up to secondary school. The social workers also engaged the parents and children to help them grow their funds through skill training, livelihood program and job opportunities.

Years later, in the new place I was working, I was informed that I had visitors. To my amazement, here were a few youths who had been enrolled in the sponsorship program in the past. They now had jobs, working for the government or private companies. They wanted to show their gratefulness for the opportunity they had received in going to school. This unexpected visit remains

vividly etched in my memory. Even though sponsorship presents limitations it is not a one-time philanthropic act, but a sustained investment which contributes to the development of the social, cultural and economic conditions of the families.

I feel humbled to have known these families. They have worked hard, are now living modest lives in a dignified environment, and they serve others in social transformation as well.

Dr Gracy F., Mumbai, India



MAINTAINING POSITIVE CONNECTIONS AND TAKING CARE OF OTHERS

The training course on «social and cultural mediation» was created in Bangui, in the Central African Republic in 2016, following the idea «Let's encourage young people who are already involved in their community to develop their care of the most fragile, with research and learning methods which enable us to achieve what we undertake.»

In the context of this training, set up by ATD Fourth World with partners including the Central African Agency for Professional Training and Employment (ACFPE), the social and cultural mediators develop their ability to create or rebuild social links with people living with the daily violence of extreme poverty, so as to allow them to take part in social life (market, associations, health center, local authorities, etc.) and cultural connections (school centers, youth centers, media, etc.). They trained in a spirit of openness to those who still miss out on life in society, so as to build a country that leaves no-one behind and with the aim of a long-lasting professional or



Hélène Perdereau

volunteer commitment, rooted in the knowledge of the realities of poverty and experience on the ground.

Today, faced with the Covid-19 pandemic, which is coming to each country in turn, the young mediators have realized that their training will be very useful for more pertinent action. At this point of the epidemic in the capital, we find them visiting districts to share genuine information on the epidemic and above all to teach the main actions that can slow its propagation down. They also combat rumors which could assign guilt to people, which could increase panic levels, or which could make people think they are protected by fake remedies.

These young people, like others elsewhere in the world, give us hope. They are themselves living in difficult circumstances and yet they are taking initiatives to maintain positive connections and to take care of others.

ATD Fourth World, Bangui, Central African Republic

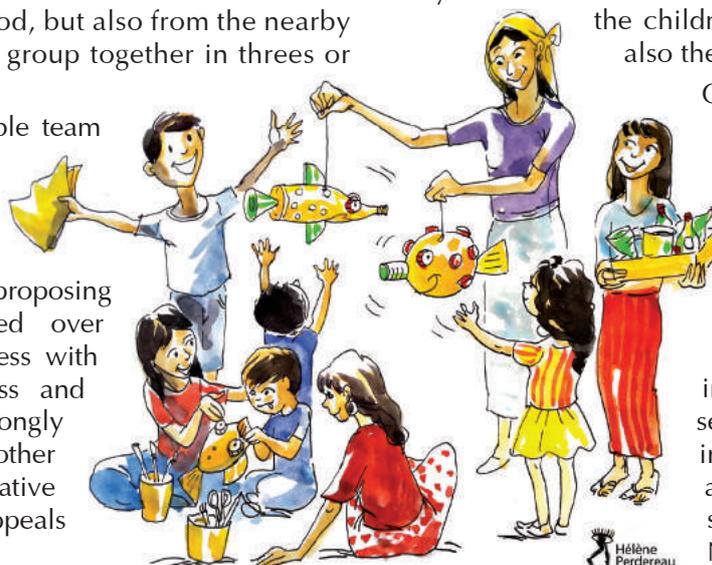
MY RECYCLING WORKSHOPS WITH THE CHILDREN

From a very early age, I learnt from my mother how to embroider and knit wool. I also like working with children and since 2015, I have been working in a youth center in Naciria, a neighborhood of a small town in Algeria. The center is used by youths and children from modest families from the neighborhood, but also from the nearby mountain villages. The latter group together in threes or fours to come in.

At this center I found a reliable team consisting of the manageress, Nassima, very motivated and trusting, and Hakima, a lady who gives French lessons to the children. I started by proposing video games and developed over time a friendship and closeness with the children. The manageress and my supervisor Mrs. Hayat strongly encouraged me to create other activities. I chose a "creative recycling workshop" which appeals to my taste for manual work.

In 2016 I formed a group of 15 children aged eight to thirteen. We work on themes connected to the environment. It is often the children who choose them. The workshop takes place in two phases: the first consists of understanding and discovering the theme, and the second is the manual work. For instance, we learnt how

fish live, then we made a fish using recycled materials (cardboard, corks, etc). I also suggested a workshop to learn to tell the time since I discovered that several of the children could not, then together we made a watch from recycled materials. These workshops offer a place where the children can discover themselves and also the world they live in.



Hélène Perdereau

One day a mentally handicapped boy came to the group. I took the time to show him the various objects we had made. His mother confided in me afterwards that he looked forward to these sessions which was not the case for school, where he did not fit in. Later on, I was able to train several coordinators who work in other youth centers, and even a neighbor who was in a difficult situation and looking for work. Now she is making and selling decorative objects.

Sirine, seven years of age, takes part in the workshops. She says "I learnt with my trainer Bahia to cut out leaves, and to draw. I learnt about animals. She teaches us very gently. I like my trainer."

Bahia. L, Centre Naciria, Algeria

OCTOBER 17, 2020 THEME

At the beginning of the year, we launched a consultation to choose the theme for the World Day for Overcoming Extreme Poverty 2020.

Theme proposals were sent to a number of people and associations to gather their opinions.

We received 76 responses from 36 countries.

Thank you to all those who took part, your contributions provided a variety of inputs and, after presenting and discussing them with the UN, the final theme for October 17 has been chosen:

“Acting together to achieve social and environmental justice for all”

Below are some extracts of the contributions we received.

SEEKING THE PARTICIPATION OF ALL

“Dialogue is vital for community life because each individual is responsible for building their own world (the neighborhood, friends, family etc.). Everyone has the right to express themselves and to be able to take responsibility for building the world they want, including those in deepest poverty.” (Ms. Consolate N., Burundi)

“There is an urgent need to consider the environment in every aspect of our daily lives. We show a desire to consider the most vulnerable to be key in decision-making regarding the environment and the use of natural resources.”

(Jean B., Concordia-Ineza Foundation, Rwanda)

“Governments are elected democratically in name but are increasingly controlled by business entities and serving investor interests. People’s voices have largely been forgotten in major decision-making processes. Those living in poverty and exclusion have been further pushed out to the margins. We need to recapture the political space.”

(Aye Aye W., Myanmar/France, International Committee for October 17)

INTERDEPENDENCE BETWEEN SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

“Those living in poverty are the most affected and it is important to make young people in particular understand that the fight against climate change needs to become a fight against extreme poverty.” (ATD Fourth World, Haiti)

“Fundamental rights and the Sustainable Development Goals form a perfect link between human and environmental development, and between ending poverty (Goal 1) and forming partnerships globally and with those living in poverty (Goal 17). This last link offers a methodology, one of cooperation.”

(Lise-Marie S., Union Nationale d’Associations de Parrainage de Proximité, National October 17 Committee, France)

INJUSTICE OF BEING ACCUSED OF A GLOBAL SITUATION

“Those living in poverty are stigmatized and are increasingly being accused of contributing to atmospheric pollution, for example for using heating materials which are not environmentally friendly.” (Maja G. M., Macedonia)

“Native populations rely on natural resources to survive, providing them with a source of income, food, energy, shelter, health care and much more. Developed countries who have already taken advantage of their natural resources, putting the climate at risk, force developing countries to not exploit forest resources, with the reason of fighting against climate change.”

(Dieudy M., Compagnons d’Action pour le Développement Familial, Democratic Republic of Congo)

WE ARE ACTING FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AND A WORLD WITHOUT POVERTY

“I think of the families in the village of Isampulu in Kinshasa who are building their own houses on stilts to protect themselves against flooding and illness. This shows solidarity not only between, but with, people struggling to overcome poverty.”

(Justin B., Democratic Republic of Congo, International Committee for October 17)

“We are looking to make sure that those who are most affected and most vulnerable are the ones to lead change. In one of our recent projects we focused on plastic recycling and worked with Caritas, women in charge of recycling in a cooperative in Córdoba and a specialist professor from the university of technology.” (Cecilia L., Argentina)