

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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LEAVING NO-ONE BEHIND

The families directly hit by typhoon Haiyan, who are desperately searching for their loved ones and supporting each other in the struggle to resist giving up, remind us of all those whose lives are ceaselessly devastated and yet never lose hope. Only recently I met some families in the Paris area who are worried because they are going to have to leave the neighbourhood where they found a home after what has been, in some cases, years of wandering. Their dilapidated homes are due for demolition, but no lasting alternative has been offered to them. Because they live in poverty, the town does not want them and would like them to go elsewhere. But where? To avoid giving in to despair they are getting organised and mobilising themselves, determined not abandon those among them who have already been worn down by years of hardship.

The violence caused by poverty is intolerable. So is the violence with which the intelligence, experience and courage of those who daily resist poverty is ignored and even denied. Yet their knowledge and experience could teach society a powerful and relevant lesson about living together in a way that respects each person's dignity.

"It is true that my life is very difficult, but I still worry about those that no-one sees those who are not even included in the poverty statistics. Those are the people we should worry about first." These are the words of a father in La Paz during

the research project evaluating the impact of the Millennium Development Goals that the ATD Fourth World Movement has been conducting with over 2000 participants in 12 countries. Despite the prevailing insecurity, which makes things even more difficult, young people whom we know in Bangui continue taking books to read with children in the most neglected neighbourhoods so that their intelligence is stimulated and preserved. They show us in this way the depth and quality of human commitment which is necessary if we want to build our society in a way that truly includes everyone. In Switzerland, one woman fighting against material shortages and humiliation tells us of her fear that the battle for eradicating poverty in the name of progress, will become a battle against the poorest.

Those facing chronic poverty, in the North and the South, who took part in this evaluation project echo in their recommendations the General Secretary of the United Nations when in his report he insists on "a life with dignity for everyone". The post development targets which the international community will fix for itself must leave no-one behind. This can only be achieved if from the start those with experience of the worst forms of poverty are involved in the project.

Isabelle Perrin, Director General
International Movement ATD Fourth World



WORDS FROM THE FORUM ON OVERCOMING EXTREME POVERTY TEAM

Working in true partnership with people living in extreme poverty is what each of us strives to achieve all year round, and it is what we shared publicly this year on the World Day for Overcoming Extreme Poverty 2013. It was clear to see in all of the reports and contributions sent in to the Forum on Overcoming Extreme Poverty by its correspondents. For this, you have our wholehearted thanks. We realise how much it takes for every one of you to send us an article, a photograph, a radio recording... We are already aware of more than 230 events that took place in 41 countries. You can read all about them on www.overcomingpoverty.org, and you can still write in with your own news.

We want to carry on exchanging our experiences, moving forward together and working towards a world free of discrimination with the Letter to Friends Around the World. Five recommendations have emerged from our work on

evaluating the Millennium Development Goals. And the experiences brought to you in this issue highlight their importance. It is what we learn from the Kindele Rural Association in DR Congo, helping young people who would otherwise be forgotten and abandoned; from Mati in Bangladesh, where a whole village has come together to make a development project work; and from the CIAF in Brazil, fighting the preconception that impoverished people have nothing to say about the world! Last but not least, the Rio Foundation really brings home the link between respecting the environment and human dignity.

These four stories of commitment from our correspondents, as well as letters from our readers, really help us to understand the challenges contained in the recommendations for the next step of the Millennium Development Goals, leading on from 2015.



● **"HOW CAN SOMEONE WHO DOESN'T EVEN HAVE ENOUGH TO EAT BE CAPABLE OF THINKING ABOUT THE STATE OF THE WORLD?"**

A group of mothers from a shantytown who are also members of CIAF (Integrated Aid Centre for Families) have experience of this kind of prejudice. By getting together to look at the Millennium Development Goals, they have been able for the first time to voice their desire that things should change in education, healthcare and quality of life. And the fact that they have been able to do so has given them a much more positive view of themselves.

Carla says that all children and teenagers should go to school and receive vocational training to prepare them for the job market. The government should be more active. As for women's health, there is a need for more medical attention during pregnancy and check-ups: they need to eat better, and those working in hospitals and health centres should be more helpful!

Adriana feels that workers should be paid more so that they can live with dignity. At school, pupils should only move

up to the next class if they are able to read and write. And as for healthcare, "The quality of health centres is very poor. There are not enough doctors to go around, and both receptionists and physicians are very unpleasant. The wait between appointments is too long."

Rosilaine thinks better schools are needed, as well as jobs, houses and an effective health system. "I am trying to change things at home: I keep an eye on my family. I urge them to work, to study, to be good caring citizens, to set an example. It isn't easy, but I try!"

Valéria believes that proper land reform is the first step. Very poor families need to be taken care of: instead of giving them fish, give them a fishing rod and an opportunity to go fishing. This way, families will be able to develop together and parents will be able to help their children. As for equal rights for women, this should start in childhood, between brothers and sisters.

Solange adds that the government should invest in industry, thus creating jobs. To fight AIDS and other illnesses: condoms, screenings, more free medication and medical care.

Aline, Eliete and Raiane like the others, all expressed their hopes for younger generations as well as the environment: "Trees should be respected and cultivated. Rivers should not be polluted. We should also keep our streets clean, and stop wasting water and energy". The whole group thinks this will be achieved by investing in infrastructures for sewage, for recycling...

WILSON O., CIAF, BRAZIL

● THE PROMISE OF A BETTER FUTURE

Kindele Rural Association for Community Development teaches unemployed young people how to regain their place in society.

The main cause of poverty in our country is the population explosion. Resources have not kept pace with the growth of the population so people go hungry for lack of sufficient food and young people feel they have no future.

Discouragement has never helped anyone succeed. One way to addressing the situation has been the setting up of groups in the informal sector. Certainly small projects themselves will not transform the country, but they are a promising sign. They point to a better future as illustrated by our experience through the Kindele Association which brings together young people from a neighbourhood on the outskirts of the capital.

We formed teams on three different sites with 35 young people who were unemployed, victims of social exclusion, made poor by injustices and all kinds of violence. Their activity is small-scale market gardening projects which are run as cooperatives. Forming small groups is said to be the best option for those of very limited possibilities.

Initially we help them learn how to work together effectively in groups. Each member must do his / her part. The success of the enterprise requires the unqualified contribution of each member. This means that each young person must contribute to the different tasks: preparing the soil, sowing, harvesting and all the other jobs necessary before marketing the products to consumers. In this group work, sharing and actively participating in the community project are important. As victims of violence, these young people have had no one to stand by them. Living in deep poverty and suffering many deprivations, they easily fell into anxiety, agitation and vio-



lence. Feeling themselves rejected it was difficult for them to be at peace. And as a way of rebelling against the society that gave them birth and then rejected them, they took to the streets where they became "street children" rather than "children in the street." People regarded them as the dregs of society and held them responsible for any problems. They were seen as delinquents, trouble-makers, reckless - 'KULUNA'. The young people were unable to go to school because they did not have either the means or the appropriate clothing.

Thanks to the market gardening project started by the Association, gradually the young people are beginning to feel that they do have a place in society. With the sale of their fresh produce, some of the young people are starting to go to school, resolving their day-to-day problems and feeding their families. All of this serves to help them to become aware of the many possibilities that the Association is opening up for them.

To date, more than 20 young people have regained their independence by creating activities whereby they can develop and support themselves on a piece of their own land. From time to time, a technical team visits them to follow up and evaluate how the projects are developing

MR JEAN PH.D, PRESIDENT OF THE KINDELE RURAL ASSOCIATION FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, DR CONGO

● **WE DEFINE TOGETHER WITH PEOPLE
WHAT DEVELOPMENT MEANS FOR THEM.**

Lenen R., is from Bangladesh and works for the grassroots NGO MATI (which means "Soil") which he founded in 1997. They work in the North of Bangladesh together with people living below the poverty line.

MATI works in the fields of women's empowerment, education and livelihood development. Their central approach is that they define together with people what "development" means for them, and plan and implement projects together.

We have a project called the "Millennium Village", where we and the villagers work in the framework of the Millennium Development Goals in an absolutely participatory approach. We have experienced improvements in many fields such as education, access to safe water, or debt reduction.

Bangladesh is hailed as the "mother-country of micro-credit" but we believe what people really need are commitment and relationships, not only money. I asked a woman in the Millennium Village "What does poverty mean for you in concrete terms?" She told me "I am not poor, I can work, so I can earn money, I only need a decent job." This should be understood as a call for a future where each person has an opportunity to use the skills that they have.

In the "Millennium Village", we try to improve living conditions according to the villagers' priorities. Many children were not going to school, as there was no pre-school in the village, and the school of another NGO had only a few places. In order to be admitted into Class 1 of a

Government school, children need a pre-school education to pass the entry exam.

Together the villagers built a small community centre in the middle of the village, one room was for the school, the other for sewing training for the women. Every year 40 children (aged 4-6) go to the pre-school, in two shifts (20 each time). The teacher is a literate woman from the community. As the school is in the heart of the village, it is only a few metres from the children's homes. A school day takes 1.5 hours, this is the concentration span of the kids. The mothers can sit in the courtyard and see what is going on in the school. Often the community have discussions between themselves about what they desire from the school or the teacher.

LENEN R., BANGLADESH



● **BREAKING THE CIRCLE OF POVERTY AND
ENVIRONMENTAL DESTRUCTION**

The "Rio Foundation" is an environmental protection organisation that has been working for 23 years in the Rio San Juan Biosphere in south east Nicaragua. It has always been committed to working with the most underprivileged communities, and believes that a world of justice, solidarity and harmony between mankind and nature is possible.

In terms of natural resources, this reserve is one of the richest, but its people are among the poorest in the country, with high levels of illiteracy, teenage pregnancy and child malnutrition. Spiritual and financial poverty is the main heritage passed on from parents to their children.

A number of monoculture projects have been set up in this area, involving the African palm tree for example. These plantations are the property of rich foreign or local landowners, who bought the land at low prices from local farmers, taking advantage of their poverty, and the lack of stability of a population that is accustomed to migrations.

This situation has created several problems. Families who have sold their property have to resettle in areas that are increasingly deprived of public investment, without roads, schools or health centres. Those who remain find they are forced to change their way of life. They have to stop cultivating food crops, and become agricultural workers exploited by the same company that robbed them of their

land, dependent upon the salary this company pays them.

With the help of international cooperation agencies, various groups have started to break down this vicious circle of poverty and environmental destruction. For instance, members of the Cooperative of Cocoa Producers United Families of the Chateau (COOPROCAFUC R.L.), who cultivate and sell organic cocoa, have been able to create a stable market that generates income for them all year round.

One of the keys to success lies in the fact that it is the farmers themselves who run these projects, with the help of supporting agencies, and who have succeeded in developing know-how that enables them to deal with any difficulties.

In Central America, many farming communities and indigenous peoples are displaced due to monoculture farming. This limits their capacity to escape the poverty trap and preserve their natural heritage. We cannot continue to believe that money prevails over everything else, and that human beings are just production factors for big business. If we can change this way of thinking, that will be the first step towards a world of justice and equality.

SAÚL O. Y TERESA M., NICARAGUA

LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

• Hello Letter to Friends Team,
In the eastern part of Cameroon, in a town on the border with the Central African Republic, refugees have been arriving for the last 8 months. During our visit I observed serious problems in the relationship between the refugees and local people. Since the refugees have arrived, insecurity has increased and continues to do so. The local population is angry about this, and accuses the refugees of causing it. As a result there is increased conflict and the local population does not want to have any refugees in the town.

So how can we have reconciliation between the refugees who don't even have the bare minimum, and a population that earns a living from subsistence farming?

This was the fundamental problem that led us to bring the two parties together at the Catholic Mission. The aim was to find a basis for agreement that would enable both parties to leave with a satisfac-

tory outcome; not an easy thing to do. But eventually, the local population made concessions, even allowing the refugees to work with them on the land if they so wished, and to benefit from the harvest, instead of stealing it every day. This was quite a moving development for me, because the local population, by offering hospitality, also offers the refugees a way to fight poverty. As for the refugees, they will not only escape enforced idleness, but in addition they will find a way to express their humanity.

Blaise N., Cameroon

• A big hello from your friends in Lebanon, for this great day of 17 October, which we love just as you do, and celebrate as best we can.

We have received many Syrian refugees in our neighbourhood, where the population density is already very high. This is causing many problems, for them of course, and also for the neighbourhood.

Relations between Lebanon and its neighbour Syria have not been easy at all, especially during the years of the Lebanese civil war. The Lebanese still have feelings of resentment and suspicion towards their neighbours.

So, welcoming these Syrian families to our neighbourhood association was something that caused us to ask ourselves questions. On the one hand, we feel we have a duty to be close to them since we have been through what they are experiencing, we have experienced the same anguish, bereavements, displacements, loss of homes, etc. On the other hand, this is a challenge, because we are tempted to think: "Good, now it's their turn!". Each one of us is either able to feel, suffer and have compassion for these refugees, or not. But it is within this context that we are trying to determine what kind of relationship we should have with each other.

Marie-Ange L., Lebanon

SEEN ON THE WEBSITE

Five recommendations for the post-2015 agenda based on the experience of the people who are the most disadvantaged

In order to define a set of goals that will deliver truly sustainable development, experts around the world have been sharing their opinions on the successes and failures of the Millennium Development Goals that end in 2015. Because of the heavy demands of survival, the shame, and the prejudices they face, those who live in extreme poverty throughout the world are most often absent from this debate about the future. And yet, what is designed without them often turns against them. This is why ATD Fourth World – through a participatory action-research project entitled: "Knowledge drawn from experience: Building the post-2015 agenda with people living in extreme poverty" sought the opinion of those who are the most disadvantaged and therefore the most concerned by the often repeated commitment to eradicate poverty.

Since 2012, some 2000 people from a dozen countries, from both industrialised and developing nations (Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Burkina Faso,

France, Guatemala, Haiti, Mauritius, Madagascar, Peru, Philippines, Poland) alongside academics, decision-makers, and practitioners – including United Nations officials – participated in interviews and meetings through which they developed the following recommendations.

Five recommendations for the post-2015 agenda

1. Leave no one behind. This requires all countries eliminating discrimination based on gender, social origin or poverty.
2. Introduce people living in poverty as new partners in building our knowledge of development.
3. Promote an economy that respects people and the environment, and that includes decent jobs and social protection.
4. Encourage cooperation at school between all stakeholders - the students, their families, teachers and commu-

nities - in order to provide education and training for all. Most people living in poverty consider education to be the best way out of poverty for their children.

5. Promote peace through participatory good governance. This means helping communities to form their own support organizations and ensuring that local, national, and international institutions put into place participatory mechanisms.

In order to create an environment conducive to the eradication of extreme poverty, it is essential that human rights be respected, since human rights violations are both a cause and a consequence of extreme poverty. The Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights* constitute a useful tool for implementing those rights that are the most critical to people living in extreme poverty.

* Adopted by the United Nations Human Rights Council in September 2012.

To find out more, download the document : "Towards Sustainable Development that Leaves No One Behind: The Challenge of the Post-2015 Agenda"
http://www.atd-fourthworld.org/IMG/pdf/Working_Paper_ATD_Fourth_World_Participatory_Research_June_2013.pdf

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.
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HÉLÈNE PERDREAU'S
COMMITMENT IS TO
ILLUSTRATE THE TEXTS
OF THE LETTER
ON A FREE-TIME BASIS
PAGE SETUP:
LYDIE ROUFFET